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Patent and Trademark Office: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL

(Only for new nonprovisional applications under 37 C.F.R. § 1.53(b))

Attorney Docket No.	RJ167
First Inventor or Application Identifier	RAYMOND A. JOAO
Title	APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING AND/OR FOR FULFILLING SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES
Express Mail Label No.	EK356632681US

jc825 U.S. PTO 09/659264 09/11/00

APPLICATION ELEMENTS

See MPEP chapter 600 concerning utility patent application contents.

ADDRESS TO: **Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Box Patent Application, Washington, DC 20231**

1. [X] * Fee Transmittal Form *(e.g., PTO/SB/17)* *(Submit an original and a duplicate for fee processing)*
2. [X] Specification [*Total Pages* 93] *(preferred arrangement set forth below)*
   - Descriptive title of the Invention
   - Cross References to Related Applications
   - Statement Regarding Fed sponsored R & D
   - Reference to Microfiche Appendix
   - Background of the Invention
   - Brief Summary of the Invention
   - Brief Description of the Drawings *(if filed)*
   - Detailed Description
   - Claim(s)
   - Abstract of the Disclosure
3. [X] Drawing(s) *(35 U.S.C. 113)* [*Total Sheets* 10]
4. Oath or Declaration [*Total Pages* 2]
   - a. [X] Newly executed (original or copy)
   - b. [ ] Copy from a prior application (37 C.F.R. § 1.63(d)) *(for continuation/divisional with Box 16 completed)*
     - i. [ ] DELETION OF INVENTOR(S) Signed statement attached deleting inventor(s) named in the prior application, see 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.63(d)(2) and 1.33(b).

** NOTE FOR ITEMS 1 & 13: IN ORDER TO BE ENTITLED TO PAY SMALL ENTITY FEES, A SMALL ENTITY STATEMENT IS REQUIRED (37 C.F.R. § 1.27), EXCEPT IF ONE FILED IN A PRIOR APPLICATION IS RELIED UPON (37 C.F.R. § 1.28).*

5. [ ] Microfiche Computer Program *(Appendix)*
6. Nucleotide and/or Amino Acid Sequence Submission *(if applicable, all necessary)*
   - a. [ ] Computer Readable Copy
   - b. [ ] Paper Copy (identical to computer copy)
   - c. [ ] Statement verifying identity of above copies

ACCOMPANYING APPLICATION PARTS

7. [ ] Assignment Papers (cover sheet & document(s))
8. [ ] 37 C.F.R.§3.73(b) Statement *(when there is an assignee)* [ ] Power of Attorney
9. [ ] English Translation Document *(if applicable)*
10. [ ] Information Disclosure Statement (IDS)/PTO-1449 [ ] Copies of IDS Citations
11. [ ] Preliminary Amendment
12. [X] Return Receipt Postcard (MPEP 503) *(Should be specifically itemized)*
13. [X] * Small Entity Statement(s) *(PTO/SB/09-12)* [ ] Statement filed in prior application, Status still proper and desired
14. [ ] Certified Copy of Priority Document(s) *(if foreign priority is claimed)*
15. [ ] Other: .....

16. **If a CONTINUING APPLICATION,** *check appropriate box, and supply the requisite information below and in a preliminary amendment:*

[ ] Continuation [ ] Divisional [ ] Continuation-in-part (CIP) of prior application No: _____/_____

Prior application information: Examiner _____ *Group / Art Unit:* _____

For CONTINUATION or DIVISIONAL APPS only: The entire disclosure of the prior application, from which an oath or declaration is supplied under Box 4b, is considered a part of the disclosure of the accompanying continuation or divisional application and is hereby incorporated by reference. The incorporation can only be relied upon when a portion has been inadvertently omitted from the submitted application parts.

17. CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS

[ ] *Customer Number or Bar Code Label* *(Insert Customer No. or Attach bar code label here)* or [X] *Correspondence address below*

Name	RAYMOND A. JOAO, ESQ.				
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City	YONKERS	*State*	NEW YORK	*Zip Code*	10703
Country	U.S.A.	*Telephone*	914-969-2992	*Fax*	914-969-2992

Name (Print/Type)	RAYMOND A. JOAO	*Registration No. (Attorney/Agent)*	35,907
Signature	Raymond A Joao	*Date*	9/11/00

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"Express Mail" No.: EK356632681US Date: September 11, 2000
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Raymond A. Joao

RJ167

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

APPLICANT : RAYMOND A. JOAO

SERIAL NO.: PLEASE ASSIGN

FILED : SEPTEMBER 11, 2000

FOR : APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING AND/OR FOR FULFILLING SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

EXAMINER : GROUP :

Assistant Commissioner for Patents
Box Patent Application
Washington, D.C. 20231

TRANSMITTAL LETTER

Sir:

Please find enclosed herewith the following papers for filing as a Patent Application:

1. Utility Patent Application Transmittal Sheet;
2. Fee Transmittal Sheet (in duplicate);

3. Declaration (2 pages);

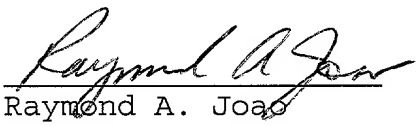
4. Small Entity Status Form;

5. Application, including Specification, Claims and Abstract of the Disclosure (93 pages), and Drawings (10 sheets);

6. Check in the amount of $345.00 for the filing fee; and

7. Return receipt postcard.

Respectfully Submitted,



Raymond A. Joao
Reg. No. 35,907

September 11, 2000

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FEE TRANSMITTAL for FY 2000

Patent fees are subject to annual revision.
Small Entity payments must be supported by a small entity statement, otherwise large entity fees must be paid. See Forms PTO/SB/09-12. See 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.27 and 1.28.

TOTAL AMOUNT OF PAYMENT ($) 345.00

Complete if Known	
Application Number	
Filing Date	SEPTEMBER 11, 2000
First Named Inventor	RAYMOND A. JOAO
Examiner Name	
Group / Art Unit	
Attorney Docket No.	RJ167

METHOD OF PAYMENT (check one)

1. ☐ The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge indicated fees and credit any overpayments to:

Deposit Account Number

Deposit Account Name

☐ Charge Any Additional Fee Required Under 37 CFR §§ 1.16 and 1.17

2. ☒ **Payment Enclosed:**
☒ Check ☐ Money Order ☐ Other

FEE CALCULATION

1. BASIC FILING FEE

Large Entity Fee Code	Large Entity Fee ($)	Small Entity Fee Code	Small Entity Fee ($)	Fee Description	Fee Paid
101	690	201	345	Utility filing fee	345.00
106	310	206	155	Design filing fee	
107	480	207	240	Plant filing fee	
108	690	208	345	Reissue filing fee	
114	150	214	75	Provisional filing fee	

SUBTOTAL (1) ($) 345.00

2. EXTRA CLAIM FEES

		Extra Claims		Fee from below	Fee Paid
Total Claims		-20** =		X	=
Independent Claims		- 3** =		X	=
Multiple Dependent					=

***or number previously paid, if greater; For Reissues, see below*

Large Entity Fee Code	Large Entity Fee ($)	Small Entity Fee Code	Small Entity Fee ($)	Fee Description
103	18	203	9	Claims in excess of 20
102	78	202	39	Independent claims in excess of 3
104	260	204	130	Multiple dependent claim, if not paid
109	78	209	39	** Reissue independent claims over original patent
110	18	210	9	** Reissue claims in excess of 20 and over original patent

SUBTOTAL (2) ($)

FEE CALCULATION (continued)

3. ADDITIONAL FEES

Large Entity Fee Code	Large Entity Fee ($)	Small Entity Fee Code	Small Entity Fee ($)	Fee Description	Fee Paid
105	130	205	65	Surcharge - late filing fee or oath	
127	50	227	25	Surcharge - late provisional filing fee or cover sheet.	
139	130	139	130	Non-English specification	
147	2,520	147	2,520	For filing a request for reexamination	
112	920*	112	920*	Requesting publication of SIR prior to Examiner action	
113	1,840*	113	1,840*	Requesting publication of SIR after Examiner action	
115	110	215	55	Extension for reply within first month	
116	380	216	190	Extension for reply within second month	
117	870	217	435	Extension for reply within third month	
118	1,360	218	680	Extension for reply within fourth month	
128	1,850	228	925	Extension for reply within fifth month	
119	300	219	150	Notice of Appeal	
120	300	220	150	Filing a brief in support of an appeal	
121	260	221	130	Request for oral hearing	
138	1,510	138	1,510	Petition to institute a public use proceeding	
140	110	240	55	Petition to revive - unavoidable	
141	1,210	241	605	Petition to revive - unintentional	
142	1,210	242	605	Utility issue fee (or reissue)	
143	430	243	215	Design issue fee	
144	580	244	290	Plant issue fee	
122	130	122	130	Petitions to the Commissioner	
123	50	123	50	Petitions related to provisional applications	
126	240	126	240	Submission of Information Disclosure Stmt	
581	40	581	40	Recording each patent assignment per property (times number of properties)	
146	690	246	345	Filing a submission after final rejection (37 CFR § 1.129(a))	
149	690	249	345	For each additional invention to be examined (37 CFR § 1.129(b))	

Other fee (specify) _____

Other fee (specify) _____

* Reduced by Basic Filing Fee Paid

SUBTOTAL (3) ($)

SUBMITTED BY				Complete (if applicable)	
Name (Print/Type)	RAYMOND A. JOAO	Registration No. (Attorney/Agent)	35,907	Telephone	914-969-2992
Signature	Raymond A Joao			Date	9/11/00

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PTO/SB/09 (12-97)
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Patent and Trademark Office; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

STATEMENT CLAIMING SMALL ENTITY STATUS (37 CFR 1.9(f) & 1.27(b))--INDEPENDENT INVENTOR	Docket Number (Optional) RJ167

Applicant, Patentee, or Identifier: RAYMOND ANTHONY JOAO

Application or Patent No.: _____

Filed or Issued: SEPTEMBER 11, 2000

Title: APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING AND/OR FOR FULFILLING SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

As a below named inventor, I hereby state that I qualify as an independent inventor as defined in 37 CFR 1.9(c) for purposes of paying reduced fees to the Patent and Trademark Office described in:

[XX] the specification filed herewith with title as listed above.

[ ] the application identified above.

[ ] the patent identified above.

I have not assigned, granted, conveyed, or licensed, and am under no obligation under contract or law to assign, grant, convey, or license, any rights in the invention to any person who would not qualify as an independent inventor under 37 CFR 1.9(c) if that person had made the invention, or to any concern which would not qualify as a small business concern under 37 CFR 1.9(d) or a nonprofit organization under 37 CFR 1.9(e).

Each person, concern, or organization to which I have assigned, granted, conveyed, or licensed or am under an obligation under contract or law to assign, grant, convey, or license any rights in the invention is listed below:

[X] No such person, concern, or organization exists.

[ ] Each such person, concern, or organization is listed below.

Separate statements are required from each named person, concern, or organization having rights to the invention stating their status as small entities. (37 CFR 1.27)

I acknowledge the duty to file, in this application or patent, notification of any change in status resulting in loss of entitlement to small entity status prior to paying, or at the time of paying, the earliest of the issue fee or any maintenance fee due after the date on which status as a small entity is no longer appropriate. (37 CFR 1.28(b))

RAYMOND ANTHONY JOAO		
NAME OF INVENTOR	NAME OF INVENTOR	NAME OF INVENTOR
Raymond Anthony Joao		
Signature of inventor	Signature of inventor	Signature of inventor
9/11/00		
Date	Date	Date

RJ167

APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING AND/OR FOR FULFILLING SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims the benefit of priority of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/154,740, filed September 17, 1999, and entitled "APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING AND/OR FOR FULFILLING SUBCRIPTION SERVICES", the subject matter and teachings of which is hereby incorporated by reference herein.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention pertains to an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services and, in particular, to an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services for periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or other goods and/or services which can be the subject of subscriptions, in a network environment.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Many individuals choose to subscribe to periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or other goods and/or services which can be the subject of subscriptions. Typically, these subscriptions involve the regular mailing and/or delivery of these periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or other goods and/or services, to the individual's residence, place of business and/or any other designated location or place.

These periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or other goods and/or services, are also typically available at newsstands, magazine stands, in stores, and/or at other places of business. It is typical that the subscriber of any of these periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or other goods and/or services, will receive a substantial discount on the respective periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or other goods and/or services, from the retail pries, newsstand prices, and/or cover or full retail prices of the respective periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or other goods and/or services.

Unfortunately, many subscribers sometimes find

that home delivery, office delivery, and/or delivery to another location is not fully satisfactory or convenient. Subscribers may find that they may be away from home and/or the office and, therefore, not have the periodical, newspaper, magazine, and/or other good and/or service, available for immediate their use or enjoyment. In other instances, the delivery of the periodical, newspaper, magazine, and/or other good and/or service, may be late, such as after the subscriber leaves the delivery destination.

For example, a subscriber may leave for work well before a newspaper is delivered thereby depriving the individual of the newspaper until the individual returns home or requiring the individual to purchase the same newspaper at a newsstand, thereby resulting in a double purchase.

In other instances, a periodical, newspaper, magazine, and/or other good and/or service, may be unused and/or wasted such at times when the individual is away, such as on vacation, or when the individual's schedule prohibits him or her from utilizing and/or enjoying the respective periodical, newspaper, magazine, and/or other

good and/or service. In these instances, a portion of the subscription is wasted.

The above-described disadvantages which are associated with subscriptions are due, in part, to the typically inflexible nature of subscriptions which typically require a delivery at a certain destination at a certain delivery frequency. As can be seen, this inflexibility can lead to great dissatisfaction with subscriptions and subscription services.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services for periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or any other good or service which could be the subject of a subscription and/or any other good and/or services provided pursuant to a relationship, contractual and/or otherwise, which provides for a regular transaction between the parties. The present invention can be utilized in fashioning an efficient manner for disseminating to a subscriber and/or a regular purchaser any good or service which can be provided in commerce.

The present invention provides an apparatus which provides flexibility in the subscription fulfillment process as well as provides flexibility in subscription itself. The present invention provides for a subscription fulfillment program which allows a subscriber to physically pick-up or obtain the respective periodical, newspaper, magazine, and/or other good or service, from a respective retail outlet or store, thereby eliminating any inconveniences which can be caused by relying on conventional home or office delivery. This provides flexibility in that an individual subscriber may obtain the respective periodical, newspaper, magazine, and/or other good or service, when he or she so desires.

The present invention provides an apparatus and a method which processes the physical pick-up of the respective periodical, newspaper, magazine, and/or other good or service, and registers same in conjunction with the subscription fulfillment process.

The present invention also provides flexibility in the subscription itself. By processing the physical pick-up of the respective periodical, newspaper, magazine,

and/or other good or service, and by accordingly registering same, the present invention facilitates the provision of a subscription which can be flexible in length of subscription period. In this manner, an individual subscriber may forego certain issues of the respective periodical, newspaper, magazine, and/or other good or service, without losing the ability to obtain future and/or additional issues in the future and thereby safeguarding and/or protecting the value of the subscription.

The present invention also provides for an improved apparatus and a method for processing subscription applications and/or requests as well as subscription renewals, extensions, and/or terminations.

The apparatus includes a central subscription processing computer which processes subscription orders and/or subscription requests and establishes subscriptions and/or subscription accounts for the respective subscribers to any of the respective periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or other goods or services, described herein. The apparatus can also include a central subscription fulfillment processing computer which processes data and/or information regarding and/or

involving fulfillment services for the respective subscriptions.

The apparatus also includes a communication device which can be utilized in order to communicate with each of the central subscription processing computer and the central subscription fulfillment processing computer.

The communication device can be utilized in order to communicate with the central subscription processing computer and the central subscription fulfillment processing computer. The communication device can transmit signals to, as well as receive signals from, each of the central subscription processing computer and the central subscription fulfillment processing computer.

The apparatus also includes a point-of-sale transaction device which processes point-of-sale transactions and/or retail transactions involving the respective periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or other goods or services, which are the subject of the respective subscription. The point-of-sale transaction device can communicate with each of the central subscription processing computer and the central subscription

fulfillment processing computer. The point-of-sale transaction device can transmit signals to, as well as receive signals from, each of the central subscription processing computer and the central subscription fulfillment processing computer.

The point-of-sale transaction device can transmit signals to, and receive signals from, the communication device. In this manner, any of the central subscription processing computer, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer, communication device, and/or the point-of-sale transaction device, may communicate with each other.

A plurality of point-of-sale devices can be utilized, with each device being utilized at and for a separate retail location or at a separate retail site at a retail location. A plurality of communication devices can be utilized with each communication device being associated with a subscriber. The communication device can also be located at a public location and may be a public kiosk.

The central subscription processing computer may be a single computer and/or computer system and/or may

include a plurality of computers and/or computer systems. Similarly, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer may be a single computer and/or computer system and/or may include a plurality of computers and/or computer systems.

The apparatus of the present invention can be utilized over any suitable communication network and/or system. The communications networks and/or systems on, or over, which the present invention may be utilized, can include any one or combination of telecommunication networks or systems, satellite communication networks or systems, radio communication networks or systems, digital communication networks or systems, digital satellite communication networks or systems, personal communications services networks or systems, cable television networks or systems, broadband communication networks or systems, low earth orbiting satellite (LEOs) networks or systems, as well as in, or on any internets and/or intranets, the Internet, the World Wide Web, and any other suitable communication network or system.

The apparatus of the present invention can also be utilized on, or over, the Internet and/or the World Wide

Web, and/or on, or over, any other suitable communication network or combination of communication networks.

The apparatus and method of present invention can be utilized in order to order and/or to initiate subscriptions, to renew subscriptions, to extend the term of the subscriptions, and/or to cancel and/or to terminate subscriptions, and/or to service and/or to fulfill subscriptions, for any of the subscription, and for any of the periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or goods and/or services which can be the subject of the respective subscriptions.

The apparatus and method of the present invention can facilitate the servicing and/or fulfillment of subscriptions in a network environment. The apparatus and method of the present invention can also facilitate providing subscriptions which have flexibility in the servicing and/or fulfillment of same as well as facilitates providing subscriptions which have flexibility in the length and/or the duration of the subscription.

The apparatus and method of the present

invention can also provide a centralized subscription processing and/or service and/or fulfillment apparatus or system and/or a subscription processing and/or subscription fulfillment clearinghouse. The apparatus and method of the present invention can also provide notification to subscribers and/or other parties regarding subscription offers, changes and/or information regarding and event, occurrence and/or happening regarding any of the subscriptions and/or any of the services described herein.

The present invention can be utilized in conjunction with subscriptions involving periodicals, magazines, newspapers ands/or any other informational and/or entertainment publications.

The subscription can be for conventional printed periodicals, periodicals in electronic form or "e-periodicals", and/or periodicals in any other form. The present invention can be utilized in conjunction with subscriptions regarding any good and/or service which can be the subject of commerce. In this regard, the subscriptions described herein can involve, but not be limited to, subscriptions for and/or regarding movie rentals, video rentals, movie tickets, show tickets,

airline tickets, bus tickets, gasoline purchases, postage stamps and/or postage, meals tickets, tickets to sporting events, tickets to entertainment events, tickets to theater performances, professional services, contracted for services, and/or any other good and/or service which can be the subject of commerce.

Any of the communications which occur and/or which transpire between any of the computers and/or devices, and/or which occurs between any individual subscribers and/or operators and/or administrators of any of the computers and/or devices, can be effected by or via electronic mail (e-mail), electronic message transmission, telephone message, voice mail message, pager message, beeper message, conventional mail letter or message, letter, telephone call, and/or any other manner and/or mode of communication.

The present invention can provide for, and can perform fulfillment services for, and regarding, subscriptions which have flexibility in when issues can be obtained and/or skipped while still providing the individual subscriber with the value of, and/or with the number of subscriptions which the individual subscriber has

contracted for. The amount of subscription flexibility can be dictated by each subscription providing and/or offering entity.

The central subscription processing computer and/or the central subscription fulfillment processing computer can provide processing for any number and/or type of subscriptions. The central subscription processing computer and/or the central subscription fulfillment processing computer can administer, manage, service, and/or provide processing, for any number and/or types of subscriptions.

The apparatus and method of the present invention can provide for subscriptions which can be initiated and/or created via any communication device and/or any point-of-sale transaction device.

The subscriptions can be fulfilled and/or services by any retail and/or other facility. In this manner, an individual subscriber may initiate a subscription for a periodical from any location and pick up the issues of the subscription from any retail facility, newsstand and/or store which is a participating facility

and/or a facility which utilizes the present invention and/or which utilizes an appropriate point-of-sale transaction device. In this manner, flexibility is provided regarding the issue pick-up location.

The individual subscriber or an agent and/or other third party intermediary, can access the central subscription processing computer and/or the central subscription fulfillment processing computer, via the communication device and/or via the point-of-sale transaction device so as to ascertain the status of a subscription such as, but not limited to, whether the subscription is active or inactive, and/or the fulfillment status of the subscription, such as, but not limited to, the number of issues remaining, time for next renewal, etc.

The central subscription processing computer and/or the central subscription fulfillment processing computer can also notify individual subscribers, via any means, method and/or manner of communication, via the communication device and/or the point-of-sale transaction device, of available subscriptions, of subscription sales and/or specials, of available new issues, renewal notices, extension notices, termination notices, subscription

creation and/or initiation notices, shipment to and/or arrival of the subscription issue, goods and/or services at a respective retail facility and/or other facility, and/or of any other information which may be of interest to an individual subscriber.

The apparatus and method of the present invention can be utilized as a subscription clearinghouse, to match individual subscribers with subscriptions, wherein information regarding any number of, and types of, subscriptions can be stored in the central subscription processing computer and/or the central subscription fulfillment processing computer. Any individual subscriber can access the respective central subscription processing computer and/or central subscription fulfillment processing computer and search for a desired subscription or subscriptions. The individual subscriber may then apply for, and/or purchase a subscription.

An individual subscriber can list an order for a subscription and/or subscriptions, with information regarding the order being stored in the central subscription processing computer and/or the central subscription fulfillment processing computer. The central

subscription processing computer and/or the central subscription fulfillment processing computer can thereafter process the order or order and notify the individual via the communication device and/or the point-of-sale transaction device if and when the ordered subscription is available.

The individual subscriber may be notified via e-mail, electronic transmission, pager message, beeper message, telephone call, telephone message, letter, voice message, physical mail delivery, and/or via any other appropriate means, method and/or technique.

Any of the central subscription processing computer(s), the central subscription fulfillment processing computer(s), the communication device(s), and/or the point-of-sale transaction device(s), can be programmed for automatic operation, self-activation, and/or programmed operation. The central subscription processing computer and/or the central subscription fulfillment processing computer can be programmed to automatically generate and/or to transmit messages and/or notices to any of the individual subscribers, retailers, goods and/or services providers, etc., regarding subscriptions, subscription

fulfillment, the availability of subscriptions, availability of issues and/or goods and/or services which are the subject of a subscription.

Intelligent agents, software agents, and/or mobile agents, can be utilized so as to act on behalf of any of the parties and/or any of the respective computers and/or devices described herein.

Accordingly, it is an object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or fulfilling subscription services.

It is another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or fulfilling subscription services, in a network environment.

It is still another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or fulfilling subscription services which allows an individual subscriber to control the manner in which the subscription is fulfilled.

It is yet another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or fulfilling subscription services which provides for flexibility, as to time, location, and/or good or service provider, in the fulfillment of the subscription.

It is another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services which provides for a subscription which is characterized by a subscription period, term and/or duration, which allows an individual subscriber to skip issues, goods and/or services, which are the subject of the subscription while still allowing the individual subscriber to obtain and/or to benefit from the value of the subscription.

It is still another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services which facilitates an initiation of a subscription, an renewal of a subscription, an extension of a subscription, and/or the cancellation and/or termination a subscription.

It is yet another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services which provides notification to an individual subscriber regarding subscriptions, status of their subscriptions, information regarding fulfillment of subscriptions, and/or status of fulfillment of their subscriptions.

It is another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services which provides for a flexible subscription as well as a flexible subscription fulfillment.

It is still another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services which allows a subscriber to physically pick-up or obtain the issue, good or service, which is the subject of the subscription.

It is yet another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services which provides and/or

processes subscription initiations, renewals, extensions, and/or terminations.

It is another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services which can be utilized in conjunction with point-of-sale transaction devices, personal computers, personal communication devices, public communication devices and/or kiosks.

It is still another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services which can be utilized on, over, and/or in conjunction with, any communication system.

It is yet another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services which can be utilized on, over, and/or in conjunction with, the Internet and/or the World Wide Web.

It is another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for

fulfilling subscription services which provides for centralized subscription processing and/or service and/or fulfillment services processing for any kind and/or type of subscription.

It is still another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services which provides for processing of subscription payment information.

It is yet another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services provide notification regarding available subscriptions, subscription sales and/or specials, available new issues, renewal notices, extension notices, termination notices, subscription creation and/or initiation notices, shipment to and/or arrival of a subscription issue, goods and/or services, at a respective retail facility and/or other facility, and/or of any other information which may be of interest to an individual subscriber.

It is another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services which provides a clearinghouse for matching individual subscribers to subscriptions.

It is still another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services which provides for an apparatus which is programmed to provide any of the functionality described herein.

It is yet another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services which can be utilized in conjunction with intelligent agents, software agents, and/or mobile agents.

Other objects and advantages of the present invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art upon a review of the Description of the Preferred Embodiment taken in conjunction with the Drawings which follow.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the Drawings:

Figure 1 illustrates the apparatus of the present invention, in block diagram form;

Figure 2 illustrates the central subscription processing computer of Figure 1, in block diagram form;

Figure 3 illustrates the central subscription fulfillment processing computer of Figure 1, in block diagram form;

Figure 4 illustrates the communication device of Figure 1, in block diagram form;

Figure 5 illustrates the point-of-sale transaction device of Figure 1, in block diagram form;

Figure 6 illustrates a flow diagram of a preferred embodiment operation of the present invention in initiating a subscription;

Figures 7A and 7B illustrate a flow diagram of a preferred embodiment operation of the present invention in providing fulfillment services for a subscription; and

Figures 8A and 8B illustrate a flow diagram of another preferred embodiment operation of the present invention in providing fulfillment services for a subscription.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention provides an apparatus and a method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services for periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or any other good or service which could be the subject of a subscription and/or any other good and/or services provided pursuant to a relationship, contractual and/or otherwise, which provides for a regular transaction between the parties. The present invention can be utilized in fashioning an efficient manner for disseminating to a subscriber and/or a regular purchaser any good or service which can be provided in commerce.

The present invention provides an apparatus which provides flexibility in the subscription fulfillment process as well as provides flexibility in subscription itself.

The present invention provides for a subscription fulfillment program which allows a subscriber to physically pick-up or obtain the respective periodical, newspaper, magazine, and/or other good or service, from a respective retail outlet or store, thereby eliminating any inconveniences which can be caused by relying on conventional home or office delivery. This provides flexibility in that an individual subscriber may obtain the respective periodical, newspaper, magazine, and/or other good or service, when he or she so desires.

The present invention provides an apparatus and a method which processes the physical pick-up of the respective periodical, newspaper, magazine, and/or other good or service, and registers same in conjunction with the subscription fulfillment process.

The present invention also provides flexibility in the subscription itself. By processing the physical

pick-up of the respective periodical, newspaper, magazine, and/or other good or service, and by accordingly registering same, the present invention facilitates the provision of a subscription which can be flexible in length of subscription period. In this manner, an individual subscriber may forego certain issues of the respective periodical, newspaper, magazine, and/or other good or service, without losing the ability to obtain future and/or additional issues in the future and thereby safeguarding and/or protecting the value of the subscription. For example, an individual may forego picking up an issue of a newspaper of magazine and, depending on the conditions of the subscription, be entitles to extend his or her subscription and/or ability to receive an number of future issues of the newspaper or magazine, thereby providing flexibility in the subscription period.

The present invention also provides for an improved apparatus and a method for processing subscription applications and/or requests as well as subscription renewals, extensions, and/or terminations.

Applicant hereby incorporates by reference herein

the subject matter and teachings of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/154,740 which teaches and discloses an apparatus and method for providing and/or for fulfilling subscription services.

The term "subscription provider", and/or any plural use thereof, refers to any provider of any of the subscriptions described herein, and/or any agent, broker, and/or third party acting on behalf or the subscription provider, publisher, goods provider, service provider, and/or any other relevant entity.

The term "subscription fulfillment provider", and/or any plural use thereof, refers to any provider of services for fulfilling any of the herein described subscriptions described herein.

The term "subscriber", and/or any plural use thereof, refers to any subscribing individual, business, institution, and/or entity, of any of the subscription goods and/or services described herein.

Figure 1 illustrates the apparatus of the present invention in block diagram form. The apparatus is

generally denoted by the reference numeral 100. The apparatus 1 includes a central subscription processing computer 10. The central subscription processing computer 10 processes subscription orders and/or subscription requests and establishes subscriptions and/or subscription accounts for the respective subscribers to any of the respective periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or other goods or services, described herein.

The apparatus 1 also includes a central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 which processes data and/or information regarding and/or involving fulfillment services for the respective subscriptions.

In the preferred embodiment, each of the central subscription processing computer 10 and the central subscription processing computer 20 are computers and/or computer systems may be any suitable server computer, network computer, mainframe computer, mini-computer, personal computer, and/or any other computer and/or computer system which is suitable for performing the respective processing functions of the respective computers in a network environment.

The apparatus 1 also includes a communication device 30 which, in the preferred embodiment, is utilized in order to communicate with each of the central subscription processing computer 10 and the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20. In the preferred embodiment, the communication device can be a personal computer, a home computer, a personal digital assistant, a telephone, a wireless telephone, a cellular telephone, a hand-held computer, a palm-top computer, and/or any other computer and/or communication device.

The communication device 30 is utilized, in the manner described herein, in order to communicate with the central subscription processing computer 10 and the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20. In this regard, the communication device 30 can transmit signals to, as well as receive signals from, each of the central subscription processing computer 10 and the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20.

The apparatus also includes a point-of-sale transaction device 40. The point-of-sale transaction device 40 processes point-of-sale transactions and/or

retail transactions involving the respective periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or other goods or services, which are the subject of the respective subscription. The point-of-sale transaction device 40 communicates with each of the central subscription processing computer 10 and the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20. In this regard, the point-of-sale transaction device 40 can transmit signals to, as well as receive signals from, each of the central subscription processing computer 10 and the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20.

In the preferred embodiment, the point-of-sale transaction device 40 can transmit signals to, and receive signals from, the communication device 30. In this manner, any of the central subscription processing computer 10, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20, communication device 30 and/or the point-of-sale transaction device 40, may communication with each other.

In the preferred embodiment, a plurality of point-of-sale devices 40 can be utilized, with each device 40 being utilized at and for a separate retail location or at a separate retail site at a retail location. In the preferred embodiment, a plurality of communication devices

30 can be utilized with each communication device 30 being associated with a subscriber. The communication device 30 may also be located at a public location and may be a public kiosk.

The central subscription processing computer 10 may be a single computer and/or computer system and/or may include a plurality of computers and/or computer systems. In the same manner, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 may be a single computer and/or computer system and/or may include a plurality of computers and/or computer systems.

The apparatus 1 of the present invention, in the preferred embodiment, is utilized over any suitable communication network and/or system.

The communications networks and/or systems on, or over, which the present invention may be utilized, can include any one or combination of telecommunication networks or systems, satellite communication networks or systems, radio communication networks or systems, digital communication networks or systems, digital satellite communication networks or systems, personal communications

services networks or systems, cable television networks or systems, broadband communication networks or systems, low earth orbiting satellite (LEOs) networks or systems, as well as in, or on any internets and/or intranets, the Internet, the World Wide Web, and any other suitable communication network or system.

In a preferred embodiment, the apparatus 1 is utilized on, or over, the Internet and/or the World Wide Web. In other preferred embodiments, the apparatus 1 can also be utilized on, or over, any suitable communication network and/or any combination of communication networks.

Figure 2 illustrates the central subscription processing computer 10, in block diagram form. The central subscription processing computer 10, in the preferred embodiment, is a network computer or computer system which is utilized as a central subscription processing computer such as an Internet server computer and/or a web site server computer.

The central subscription processing computer 10 can also be any other computer or computer system which can be utilized in any communication network. In the preferred

embodiment, the central subscription processing computer 10 includes a central processing unit or CPU 10A, which in the preferred embodiment, is a microprocessor. The CPU 10A may also be a microcomputer, a minicomputer, a macro-computer, and/or a mainframe computer, depending upon the application.

The central subscription processing computer 10 also includes a random access memory device(s) 10B (RAM) and a read only memory device(s) 10C (ROM), each of which is connected to the CPU 10A, a user input device 10D, for entering data and/or commands into the central subscription processing computer 10, which includes any one or more of a key pad, a keyboard, a scanner, a touch pad, a signature pad, a card reader, a magnetic strip card reader, a user pointing device, such as, for example, a mouse, a touch pad, and/or an audio input device and/or a video input device, etc., if desired, which input device(s) is also connected to the CPU 10A.

The central subscription processing computer 10 also includes a display device 10E for displaying data and/or information to a user or operator.

The central subscription processing computer 10 also includes a transmitter(s) 10F, for transmitting signals and/or data and/or information to any one or more of the central subscription processing computer(s) 10, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer(s) 20, the point-of-sale transaction devices 40, and the communication devices 30, which may be utilized in conjunction with the present invention. The central subscription processing computer 10 also includes a receiver 10G, for receiving signals and/or data and/or information from to any one or more of the central subscription processing computer(s) 10, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer(s) 20, the point-of-sale transaction devices 40, and the communication devices 30, which may be utilized in conjunction with the present invention.

The central subscription processing computer 10 also includes a database 10H. The database can include data and/or information regarding the publisher or entity which provides any of the periodicals, newspapers, magazines, for which subscriptions are provided and/or available via the apparatus of the present invention. The database 10H can also include data and/or information regarding the goods provider and/or the services provider for any of the

respective goods and/or services for which subscriptions are provided and/or made available via the apparatus of the present invention.

The database 10H also includes data and/or information regarding the name of the respective periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or goods or services, which can be the subject of the subscriptions. The database 10H also includes data and/or information regarding the types of subscription available for the respective periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or goods or services, the length and/or duration of the respective subscriptions, the prices of the respective subscriptions, any conditions and/or miscellaneous information regarding the subscriptions available.

The database 10H also includes data and/or information regarding the individual subscribers, individuals, businesses, business entities, institutions, and/or others, who subscribe to any subscriptions via the apparatus of the present invention. The individual data and/or information can contain any pertinent information regarding the subscribers, such as sex, gender, age, educational level, occupation, marital status, and

information regarding the individual's credit card(s), charge card(s), debit card(s), bank accounts, and/or other financial information for allowing the individual to pay for the respective subscriptions.

The database 10H also includes information regarding the subscriptions which each individual has subscribed to, type of subscription, subscription length or duration, subscription cost, subscription renewals, subscription extensions, issues or portions of subscriptions used and still available, any/or any other relevant information regarding the respective subscriptions and/or the fulfillment of the respective subscriptions.

In the case of business subscribers, the database 10H also includes data and/or information regarding the business subscribers, the name and address of the business subscribers, the businesses of the business subscribers, the sizes of the business subscribers, information regarding the business subscriber's credit card(s), charge card(s), debit card(s), bank accounts, and/or other financial information for allowing the business subscriber to pay for the respective subscriptions.

The database 10H also includes information regarding the subscriptions which each business subscriber has subscribed to, type of subscription, subscription length or duration, subscription cost, subscription renewals, subscription extensions, issues or portions of subscriptions used and still available, any/or any other relevant information regarding the respective subscriptions and/or the fulfillment of the respective subscriptions.

The database 10H also includes information regarding the date the respective subscriptions were ordered, became effective, date of the start of the subscription, date of subscription termination, retailer and/or subscription origination agent from who the subscription originated, and the retailer, goods provider, and/or services provider, subscription service entity, and/or subscription fulfillment entity and/or agent from whom the subscriber will obtain the respective periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or goods or services, which are be the subject of the subscriptions. The database 10H also includes information regarding customer service agents and/or entities for providing customer services for, and/or regarding, any of the respective subscriptions.

The database 10H may also contain any other information which may be relevant, pertinent, useful, and/or desired, for facilitating the operation of the apparatus and method of the present invention as described herein and/or as related thereto.

The database 10H, in the preferred embodiment, is a database which may include individual databases or collections of databases, with each database being designated to store any and all of the data and/or information described herein. Applicant hereby incorporates by reference herein the teachings of Basic Business Statistics Concepts and Applications, Mark L. Berenson and David M. Levine, 6th Edition, Prentice Hall 1996.

The database 10H, or collection of databases, may be updated by each of the respective individual subscribers, central subscription processing computer operator or administrator, central subscription fulfillment processing computer operator or administrator, point-of-sale transaction device operator, communication device operator or administrator, via any of their respective computers and/or devices, and/or by any other third party, in real-

time, and/or via dynamically linked database management techniques.

The data and/or information stored in the database 10H can also be updated by external sources. The database 10H will contain any and all information deemed necessary and/or desirable for providing all of the processing and/or services and/or functions described herein. Applicant hereby incorporates by reference herein the subject matter of Fundamentals of Database Systems, by Ramez Elmasri and Shamkant B. Navathe, 2nd Ed., Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994.

The database 10H can also include any contact information for any of the subscribers, subscription providers, subscription fulfillment providers, retailers, point-of-sale entities, etc., such as, but not limited to, names, addresses, telephone numbers, fax numbers, e-mail addresses, and/or any other contact information, for the respective party. The database 10H also includes any of the above-described contact information regarding any intermediaries, third parties, agents, and/or brokers, who utilize the apparatus of the present invention.

The database 10H can also include any other data and/or information needed and/or desired for facilitating the functions and operation of the present invention as described herein.

With reference once again to Figure 2, the central subscription processing computer 10 also includes an output device 10I such as a printer, a modem, a fax/modem, or other output device, for providing data and/or information to the operator or user of the central subscription processing computer 10 or to a third party or third party entity.

Figure 3 illustrates the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20, in block diagram form. The central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20, in the preferred embodiment, is a network computer or computer system which is utilized as a central subscription fulfillment processing computer such as an Internet server computer and/or a web site server computer.

The central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 can also be any other computer or computer system which can be utilized in any communication network.

In the preferred embodiment, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 includes a central processing unit or CPU 20A, which in the preferred embodiment, is a microprocessor. The CPU 20A may also be a microcomputer, a minicomputer, a macro-computer, and/or a mainframe computer, depending upon the application.

The central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 also includes a random access memory device(s) 20B (RAM) and a read only memory device(s) 20C (ROM), each of which is connected to the CPU 20A, a user input device 20D, for entering data and/or commands into the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20, which includes any one or more of a key pad, a keyboard, a scanner, a touch pad, a signature pad, a card reader, a magnetic strip card reader, a user pointing device, such as, for example, a mouse, a touch pad, and/or an audio input device and/or a video input device, etc., if desired, which input device(s) is also connected to the CPU 20A.

The central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 also includes a display device 20E for displaying data and/or information to a user or operator.

The central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 also includes a transmitter(s) 20F, for transmitting signals and/or data and/or information to any one or more of the central subscription fulfillment processing computer(s) 20, the central subscription processing computer(s) 10, the point-of-sale transaction devices 40, and the communication devices 30, which may be utilized in conjunction with the present invention. The central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 also includes a receiver 20G, for receiving signals and/or data and/or information from to any one or more of the central subscription fulfillment processing computer(s) 20, the central subscription processing computer(s) 10, the point-of-sale transaction devices 40, and the communication devices 30, which may be utilized in conjunction with the present invention.

The central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 also includes a database 20H. The database can include data and/or information regarding the publisher or entity which provides any of the periodicals, newspapers, magazines, for which subscriptions are provided and/or available via the apparatus of the present invention. The database 20H can also include data and/or information

regarding the goods provider and/or the services provider for any of the respective goods and/or services for which subscriptions are provided and/or made available via the apparatus of the present invention.

The database 20H also includes data and/or information regarding the name of the respective periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or goods or services, which can be the subject of the subscriptions. The database 20H also includes data and/or information regarding the types of subscription available for the respective periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or goods or services, the length and/or duration of the respective subscriptions, the prices of the respective subscriptions, any conditions and/or miscellaneous information regarding the subscriptions available.

The database 20H also includes data and/or information regarding the individual subscribers, individuals, businesses, business entities, institutions, and/or others, who subscribe to any subscriptions via the apparatus of the present invention. The individual data and/or information can contain any pertinent information regarding the subscribers, such as sex, gender, age,

educational level, occupation, marital status, and information regarding the individual's credit card(s), charge card(s), debit card(s), bank accounts, and/or other financial information for allowing the individual to pay for the respective subscriptions.

The database 20H also includes information regarding the subscriptions which each individual has subscribed to, type of subscription, subscription length or duration, subscription cost, subscription renewals, subscription extensions, issues or portions of subscriptions used and still available, any/or any other relevant information regarding the respective subscriptions and/or the fulfillment of the respective subscriptions.

In the case of business subscribers, the database 20H also includes data and/or information regarding the business subscribers, the name and address of the business subscribers, the businesses of the business subscribers, the sizes of the business subscribers, information regarding the business subscriber's credit card(s), charge card(s), debit card(s), bank accounts, and/or other financial information for allowing the business subscriber to pay for the respective subscriptions.

The database 20H also includes information regarding the subscriptions which each business subscriber has subscribed to, type of subscription, subscription length or duration, subscription cost, subscription renewals, subscription extensions, issues or portions of subscriptions used and still available, any/or any other relevant information regarding the respective subscriptions and/or the fulfillment of the respective subscriptions.

The database 20H also includes information regarding the date the respective subscriptions were ordered, became effective, date of the start of the subscription, date of subscription termination, retailer and/or subscription origination agent from who the subscription originated, and the retailer, goods provider, and/or services provider, subscription service entity, and/or subscription fulfillment entity and/or agent from whom the subscriber will obtain the respective periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or goods or services, which are be the subject of the subscriptions. The database 20H also includes information regarding customer service agents and/or entities for providing customer services for, and/or regarding, any of the respective subscriptions.

The database 20H may also contain any other information which may be relevant, pertinent, useful, and/or desired, for facilitating the operation of the apparatus and method of the present invention as described herein and/or as related thereto.

The database 20H, in the preferred embodiment, is a database which may include individual databases or collections of databases, with each database being designated to store any and all of the data and/or information described herein.

The database 20H, or collection of databases, may be updated by each of the respective individual subscribers, central subscription fulfillment processing computer operator or administrator, central subscription fulfillment processing computer operator or administrator, point-of-sale transaction device operator, communication device operator or administrator, via any of their respective computers and/or devices, and/or by any other third party, in real-time, and/or via dynamically linked database management techniques.

The data and/or information stored in the database 20H can also be updated by external sources. The database 20H will contain any and all information deemed necessary and/or desirable for providing all of the processing and/or services and/or functions described herein.

The database 20H can also include any contact information for any of the subscribers, subscription providers, subscription fulfillment providers, retailers, point-of-sale entities, etc., such as, but not limited to, names, addresses, telephone numbers, fax numbers, e-mail addresses, and/or any other contact information, for the respective party. The database 20H also includes any of the above-described contact information regarding any intermediaries, third parties, agents, and/or brokers, who utilize the apparatus of the present invention.

The database 20H can also include any other data and/or information needed and/or desired for facilitating the functions and operation of the present invention as described herein.

With reference once again to Figure 3, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20

also includes an output device 20I such as a printer, a modem, a fax/modem, or other output device, for providing data and/or information to the operator or user of the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 or to a third party or third party entity.

Figure 4 illustrates the communication device 30, in block diagram form. The communication device 30, in the preferred embodiment, is a personal computer, a personal digital assistant, a communication device, and/or any other suitable computer or communication device which can be utilized to access and/or to communicate with any of the central subscription processing computer(s) 10, central subscription fulfillment processing computer(s) 20, and/or any of the point-of-sale transaction devices 40, described herein. In the preferred embodiment, the communication device 30 includes a central processing unit or CPU 30A, which in the preferred embodiment, is a microprocessor. The CPU 30A may also be a microcomputer, a minicomputer, a macro-computer, and/or a mainframe computer, depending upon the application.

The communication device 30 also includes a random access memory device(s) 30B (RAM) and a read only memory

device(s) 30C (ROM), each of which is connected to the CPU 30A, a user input device 30D, for entering data and/or commands into the communication device 30, which includes any one or more of a key pad, a keyboard, a scanner, a touch pad, a signature pad, a card reader, a magnetic strip card reader, a user pointing device, such as, for example, a mouse, a touch pad, and/or an audio input device and/or a video input device, etc., if desired, which input device(s) is also connected to the CPU 30A. The communication device 30 also includes a display device 30E for displaying data and/or information to a individual user or operator.

The communication device 30 also includes a transmitter(s) 30F, for transmitting signals and/or data and/or information to any one or more of the central subscription processing computer(s) 10, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer(s) 20, and/or to any of the point-of-sale transaction devices 40, which may be utilized in conjunction with the present invention. The communication device 30 also includes a receiver 30G, for receiving signals and/or data and/or information from any one or more of the central subscription processing computer(s) 10, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer(s) 20, and/or to any of the point-of-

sale transaction devices 40, which may be utilized in conjunction with the present invention.

The communication device 30 also includes a database(s) 30H which can contain any and/or all of the data and/or information described herein as being stored in the databases of central subscription processing computer(s) 10, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer(s) 20, and/or any of the point-of-sale transaction devices 40, described herein.

With reference once again to Figure 4, the communication device 30 also includes an output device 30I such as a printer, a modem, a fax/modem, or other output device, for providing data and/or information to the operator or user of the communication device 30 or to a third party or third party entity.

Figure 5 illustrates the point-of-sale transaction device of Figure 1, in block diagram form. In Figure 5, the point-of-sale transaction device 40, in the preferred embodiment, includes a central processing unit or CPU 40A, a scanner/reader 40B, for scanning and/or reading any of the credit cards, charge cards, debit cards,

value cards, smart cards, etc, which may be utilized in conjunction with the present invention. The scanner/reader 40A is connected to the CPU 40A. The point-of-sale transaction device 40 also includes associated random access memory 40C (RAM) and read only memory 40D (ROM) devices, which are also connected to the CPU 40A, a user input device 40E, which is typically any one or more of a key pad, a keyboard, a scanner, a touch pad, a signature pad, a card reader, a magnetic strip card reader, a user pointing device, such as, for example, a mouse, a touch pad, and/or an audio input device and/or a video input device, etc., if desired, or other suitable input device for inputting data into the point-of-sale transaction device 40 and which is also connected to the CPU 40A, and a display device 40F for displaying information and/or data to a user or operator, which display device 40F is also connected to the CPU 40A.

The point-of-sale transaction device 40 also includes a transmitter 40G for transmitting signals and/or data to the central subscription processing computer 10, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20, and/or the communication device 30 and/or to any other device associated with any of the subscription providers, the subscription fulfillment providers, and/or the

subscribers described herein. The transmitter 40G is also connected to the CPU 40A. The point-of-sale transaction device 40 also includes a receiver 40H for receiving signals and/or data from any of the central subscription processing computer 10, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20, and/or the communication device 30, and/or to any other device associated with any of the subscription providers, the subscription fulfillment providers, and/or the subscribers described herein. The receiver 40H is also connected to the CPU 40A.

The point-of-sale transaction device 40 also includes a database 40I. The database 40I can include any of the data and/or information described herein as being stored and/or which can be stored in the databases 10H, 20H and/or 30H, of the respective central subscription processing computer(s) 10, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer(s) 20, and/or the communication device(s) 30, described herein.

The point-of-sale transaction device 40 also includes a printer 40J or other appropriate output device for outputting data to the operator. The printer 40J is

also connected to the CPU 40A. In the preferred embodiment, the printer 40J prints receipts corresponding to any of the subscription transactions described herein as capable of being performed by the present invention.

The apparatus and method of present invention can be utilized in order to order and/or to initiate subscriptions, to renew subscriptions, to extend subscriptions, to cancel and/or to terminate subscriptions, and/or to service and/or to fulfill subscriptions, for any of the subscription, and for any of the periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and/or goods and/or services which can be the subject of the respective subscriptions.

The apparatus and method of the present invention facilitates the servicing and/or fulfillment of subscriptions in a network environment. The apparatus and method of the present invention also facilitates providing subscriptions which have flexibility in the servicing and/or fulfillment of same as well as facilitates providing subscriptions which have flexibility in the length and/or the duration of the subscription.

The apparatus and method of the present

invention also provides a centralized subscription processing and/or service and/or fulfillment apparatus or system and/or a subscription processing and/or subscription fulfillment clearinghouse. The apparatus and method of the present invention also provides notification to subscribers and/or other parties regarding subscription offers, changes and/or information regarding and event, occurrence and/or happening regarding any of the subscriptions and/or any of the services described herein.

In the herein-described preferred embodiment operations of the present invention, the present invention can be utilized in conjunction with subscriptions involving periodicals, magazines, newspapers ands/or any other informational and/or entertainment publications (hereinafter referred to collectively as "periodical" or "periodicals").

The subscription can be for conventional printed periodicals, periodicals in electronic form or "e-periodicals", and/or periodicals in any other form. Although described as being utilized in conjunction with subscriptions for periodicals, the preferred embodiment operations of the present invention can be utilized in

conjunction with subscriptions regarding any good and/or service which can be the subject of commerce. In this regard, the subscriptions described herein can involve, but not be limited to, subscriptions for and/or regarding movie rentals, video rentals, movie tickets, show tickets, airline tickets, bus tickets, gasoline purchases, postage stamps and/or postage, meals tickets, tickets to sporting events, tickets to entertainment events, tickets to theater performances, professional services, contracted for services, and/or any other good and/or service which can be the subject of commerce.

Figure 6 illustrates a flow diagram of a preferred embodiment operation of the present invention in creating and/or initiating a subscription to a periodical. In a preferred embodiment, the apparatus can initiate and/or create a subscription which allows the individual subscriber to pick-up the issues of the periodicals at a retail facility, such as at a newsstand and/or at a magazine stand, thereby allowing the individual subscriber the freedom and convenience of picking up issues at any desired time and/or from any desired retail facility.

The apparatus can also initiate and/or create a

subscription which can be a conventionally deliverable subscription which can be initiated and/or created via an on-line transaction and which allows the individual subscriber to dictate subscription parameters such, but not limited to, subscription conditions, subscription terms of agreement, payment methods, subscription term or period, and/or in any other manner described herein.

Operation of the apparatus commences at step 100. At step 101, the individual subscriber can access the central subscription processing computer 10 via either the respective communication device and/or the point-of-sale transaction device 40. In an alternative embodiment, the central subscription processing computer can contact the individual via the individual's communication device 30.

At step 102, the individual subscriber, the respective communication device 30 or point-of-sale device 40, can select the periodical or periodicals which the individual subscriber wishes to subscribe to. At step 102, the individual subscriber also enters and or selects the term of the subscription and/or the number of issues for which the individual subscriber wishes to subscribe. The

individual subscriber can also, at step 102, enter or select a payment method which may include payment by credit card, charge card, debit card, direct withdrawal from checking account or savings account, cash payment at the retail location and/or at the location of the point-of-sale transaction device 40, and/or via electronic money, electronic cash, electronic check, digital money, and/or digital cash, and/or via authorization to charge against and/or make payment form any of the herein-described accounts, via the respective communication device 30 and/or point-of-sale transaction device 40. The individual subscriber may also, at step 102, enter or select to pay for the subscription on a per issue basis.

At step 102, the individual subscriber may also select the manner and/or mode by which he. She or it, desires to effect subscription transactions. The individual subscriber may elect to effect transactions, such as picking up an issue of the periodical and accounting for same by utilizing an access code or personal identification number (PIN) or code, by utilizing an account card having account and/or subscription information embedded in a magnetic strip or in an embedded microprocessor or micro-controller, by utilizing a credit

card, a charge card, a debit card and/or any other device or entity for allowing the individual subscriber to effect a subscription transaction at the respective point-of-sale transaction device 40 and/or at the respective communication device 30.

At step 102, the individual subscriber can also enter and/or select any other information and/or instructions regarding the subscription, such as, for example, the number of issues desired, the length or duration of the subscription, the retail center and/or business where the individual subscriber desires or expects to pick-up and/or receive the issue or issues of the subscription periodical, and/or the retailer and/or business from which the individual subscriber desires and/or expects to receive delivery of the issue or issues of the subscription periodical. The number of issues, the length or duration of the subscription, and/or the servicing and/or fulfillment services and/or conditions, can be flexible and can be changes by the individual subscriber at any time and from any point-of-sale transaction device 40 and/or from any communication device 30 described herein.

In this manner, the apparatus and method of the present invention can be utilized to provide for flexible subscriptions and/or for flexibility in the servicing and/or fulfillment of any of the subscriptions.

At step 103, the central subscription processing computer 10, will process the subscription request and/or any other information and/or instructions entered and/or elected at step 102 and create the desired subscription.

At step 104, the central subscription processing computer 10 will transmit an appropriate confirmation message to the individual subscriber at the respective communication device 30 and/or at the respective point-of-sale transaction device 40, notifying the individual subscriber of the creation and/or the initiation of the subscription. At step 105, the central subscription processing computer 10 will transmit an appropriate message and/or signal to the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 to arrange for the fulfillment of the respective subscription. Steps 104 and 105 may be interchanged and, therefore, can be performed in any order.

At step 106, the central subscription processing computer 10 will transmit information, and/or any appropriate account card, smart card, and/or debit card, and/or any electronic and/or digital signals for programming any of the respective account card, smart card, and/or debit card, with any respective value for effecting the transactions pursuant to the subscription. The respective communication devices 30 and/or point-of-sale transaction devices 40 can also include any appropriate device for programming and/or transferring subscription value to any of the respective account cards, smart cards, and/or debit cards, described herein.

In any and/or all of the embodiments described herein, any of the communications which occur and/or which transpire between any of the computers and/or devices 10, 20, 30, and/or 40, described herein, and/or which occurs between any individual subscribers and/or operators and/or administrators of any of the computers and/or devices 10, 20, 30, and/or 40, can be effected by or via electronic mail (e-mail), electronic message transmission, telephone message, voice mail message, pager message, beeper message, conventional mail letter or message, letter, telephone call, and/or any other manner and/or mode of communication.

Once step 106 is completed, the subscription will be activated. Thereafter, the operation of the apparatus will cease at step 107.

Thereafter, the individual subscriber may access the central subscription processing computer 10, such as at step 101 and/or 102, and make changes to the subscription, renew the subscription, extend the term of the subscription, lengthen the subscription, shorten the subscription, change and/or modify any of the conditions and/or information and/or instructions regarding the subscription, described herein, and/or entered and/or selected by the individual subscriber as described with reference to the description of the flow diagram of Figure 6 and/or otherwise. The central subscription processing computer 10 will thereafter process the change to the subscription and update the subscription data and/or information accordingly.

In this manner, the individual subscriber can renew a subscription, extend the term of the subscription, lengthen a subscription, shorten a subscription, change a retail or point-of-sale location for pick-up or receipt

therefrom and/or for delivery therefrom. Subscription changes may be entered and/or selected by the individual subscriber in real-time and/or otherwise, via an respective communication device 30 and/or via any point-of-sale transaction device 40.

At any time, the individual subscriber can also access any central subscription processing computer 10 and/or any central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 in order to determine the subscription status and/or to change, alter and/or modify, any of the information, described herein and/or otherwise, which is related to, and/or regarding, the subscription, the fulfillment of the subscription, the status of the subscription, and/or the subscription fulfillment status of the subscription and/or the service status of the subscription.

The respective central subscription processing computer 10 and/or the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 will thereafter process the change to the subscription and update the subscription data and/or information accordingly.

Figures 7A and 7B illustrate a flow diagram of another preferred embodiment operation of the apparatus and method of the present invention in fulfilling subscriptions and/or servicing subscriptions. In the embodiment of Figures 7A and 7B, the apparatus allows the individual subscriber to pick-up the issues of the periodicals at a retail facility, such as at a newsstand and/or at a magazine stand, thereby allowing the individual subscriber the freedom and convenience of picking up issues at any desired time and/or from any desired retail facility.

The operation of the present invention, as illustrated and described in Figures 7A and 7B, can typically be utilized once a subscription has been created via the method described herein with reference to Figure 6, as well as by any other conventional subscription creating and/or initiation method.

In the preferred embodiment of Figures 7A and 7B, the apparatus of the present invention can also be utilized at the same time as, or in conjunction with, the creation and/or commencement of a subscription so as to provide for an immediate first issue of the periodical at the time, and or immediately following, the creation and/or commencement

of the individual subscriber's subscription. In this manner, an individual subscriber can, for example, go to a retail facility, such as a magazine stand, request and enter into a subscription for a magazine, have the subscription initiated and/or created via the point-of-sale transaction device 40, and leave the retail facility with the first issue of his or her subscription magazine. In another preferred embodiment, the operation of the apparatus of the present invention, as described herein with reference to the embodiment of Figure 6, can be readily and easily modified so as to provide the individual subscriber with a first issue of the subscription periodical and provide for an appropriate charging, debiting, and/or crediting, of the subscription account, as desired.

The operation of the embodiment of Figures 7A and 7B commences at step 200. At step 201, the individual subscriber desiring to pick up an issue of his periodical, and/or the salesperson or checkout person at the retail facility, can request the periodical issue by accessing the central subscription fulfillment processing computers 20 via the point-of-sale transaction device 40. Once the central subscription fulfillment processing computers 20 is

accessed, subscription account information is entered into the point-of-sale transaction device 40, at step 202, by inputting same via the user input device 40E and/or by swiping a respective account card, smart card, credit card, charge card, debit card, and/or value card, utilized in conjunction with the subscription account, in the scanner/reader 40B.

At step 202, any other information regarding and/or further identifying the subscription account can also be entered and/or input. At step 203, the information entered and/or input at step 202 is transmitted to, and received by, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20. At step 204, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 will process the information and determine whether the subscription account is still active. If, at step 204, it is determined that the subscription account is not active, the central subscription processing computer 20 will, at step 205, transmit a signal to the point-of-sale transaction device 40, to provide notification of the inactive or lapsed account.

Thereafter, operation of the present invention

will cease at step 206 and the individual subscriber may thereafter, access the central subscription processing computer 10 in order to re-open and/or renew the subscription. In another preferred embodiment, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 can transfer operation to the central subscription processing computer 10, at step 205. Thereafter, subscription account re-opening and/or renewal can occur on-line via the point-of-sale transaction device 40 and operation can proceed to step 202 to re-enter the pertinent account information. This preferred embodiment operation can facilitate a re-opening or renewal of the subscription account in one and the same interaction between the individual subscriber and the salesperson or check-out person at the retail facility.

If, at step 204, it is determined that the subscription account is still active, operation will proceed to step 207 and the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 will determine if any issues remain to be fulfilled on the subscription account. If, at step 207, it is determined that no issues remain to be fulfilled, then operation will proceed to step 205 described above and notification of this fact will be provided to the individual subscriber and/or the

salesperson and/or checkout person via the point-of-sale transaction device 40.

Thereafter, operation of the apparatus will proceed as described above with operation either ceasing and/or the individual subscriber renewing the subscription, extending the term of the subscription, and/or purchasing additional issues and/or arranging for same.

If, at step 207, it is determined that issues remain to be fulfilled on the subscription account, then operation will proceed to step 208 and the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 will transmit a signal to the point-of-sale transaction device 40 authorizing the pick-up of the issue by the individual subscriber. In the preferred embodiment, at step 208, the point-of-sale device 40, will generate and print a receipt of the transaction, via the printer or output device 40I, for the retail facility for the facility's records. In the preferred embodiment, at step 208, the point-of-sale device 40, will also generate and print a receipt of the transaction, via the printer or output device 40I, for the individual subscriber for the individual subscriber's records.

At step 209, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 will record the fulfillment of the issue delivery and/or transaction, decrease by one the number of issues remaining to be fulfilled on the subscription account, and provide all record updating for the subscription account.

The central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20, in the preferred embodiment, at step 209, will also update any and/or pertinent subscription account records and/or information, for the subscription account, in its database 20H as well as the corresponding records and/or information for the subscription account which are stored in the database 10H of the central subscription processing computer 10. These updates to the central subscription processing computer database 10H can be performed via transmitting an appropriate signal to the central subscription processing computer 10 and/or via dynamically linked database methods and/or techniques, and/or via nay other device, method and/or techniques known by those skilled in the art.

Thereafter, operation of the apparatus will cease at step 210.

In another preferred embodiment of the present invention, the apparatus and method of the present invention can provide for, and can perform fulfillment services for, and regarding, subscriptions which have flexibility regarding when issues can be obtained and/or skipped while still providing the individual subscriber with the value of, and/or with the number of subscriptions which the individual subscriber has contracted for. In this manner, an individual subscriber who knows ahead of time that he or she may not be able to utilized issues of the periodical at certain times, can forego obtaining same and effectively lengthen the subscription term or duration until he ort she receives all issues.

For example, in one embodiment of such a flexible subscription account, an individual subscriber can enter a subscription for a monthly magazine whereby he or she will receive twelve (12) monthly issues within a fifteen (15) month period. If the individual subscriber obtains the twelve issues prior to the end of the fifteen month period

he or she can simply renew the subscription as described herein and/or in any other appropriate manner.

The amount of subscription flexibility can be dictated by each subscription providing and/or offering entity.

Figures 8A and 8B illustrate a flow diagram of another preferred embodiment method for utilizing the apparatus of the present invention wherein the present invention is utilized to fulfill subscriptions and/or to service subscriptions.

In the preferred embodiment of Figures 8A and 8B, the apparatus of the present invention allows the individual subscriber to pick-up the issues of the periodicals at a retail facility, such as at a newsstand and/or at a magazine stand, thereby allowing the individual subscriber the freedom and convenience of picking up issues at any desired time and/or from any desired retail facility. Further, in the embodiment of Figures 8A and 8B, the present invention allows the individual subscriber to select a subscription term in which to receive or obtain a pre-specified number of issues of the subscription. In

this manner, for example, an individual subscriber may skip or miss issues of a subscription and receive or obtain future issues within the same subscription period, without forfeiting the value of the subscription.

The flexible subscription described in conjunction with the preferred embodiment of Figures 8A and 8B, can provide an individual subscriber with greater flexibility in receiving subscriptions as well as serve as an incentive to enter into a subscription in the first place. The individual subscriber can also take advantage of subscription discounts (such as discounts from cover price and/or otherwise) while obtaining the desired flexibility in obtaining subscription issues. An individual subscriber can, as a result, obtain and enjoy the full value and/or number of issues when and if he or she can.

It is understood, however, that flexibility can be limited. A subscription provider may set a maximum time period or subscription duration during which time the individual must obtain all of his or her subscription issues or forfeit same. These terms, however, can be agreed upon by the contracting parties.

The operation of the embodiment of Figures 8A and 8B commences at step 300. At step 301, the individual subscriber desiring to pick up an issue of his periodical, and/or the salesperson or checkout person at the retail facility, can request the periodical issue by accessing the central subscription fulfillment processing computers 20 via the point-of-sale transaction device 40. Once the central subscription fulfillment processing computers 20 is accessed, subscription account information is entered into the point-of-sale transaction device 40, at step 302, by inputting same via the user input device 40E and/or by swiping a respective account card, smart card, credit card, charge card, debit card, and/or value card, utilized in conjunction with the subscription account, in the scanner/reader 40B.

At step 302, any other information regarding and/or further identifying the subscription account can also be entered and/or input. At step 303, the information entered and/or input at step 302 is transmitted to, and received by, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20. At step 304, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 will

process the information and determine whether the subscription account is still active. If, at step 304, it is determined that the subscription account is not active, the central subscription processing computer 20 will, at step 305, transmit a signal to the point-of-sale transaction device 40, to provide notification of the inactive or lapsed account.

Thereafter, operation of the present invention will cease at step 306 and the individual subscriber may thereafter, access the central subscription processing computer 10 in order to re-open and/or renew the subscription. In another preferred embodiment, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 can transfer operation to the central subscription processing computer 10, at step 305. Thereafter, subscription account re-opening and/or renewal can occur on-line via the point-of-sale transaction device 40 and operation can proceed to step 302 to re-enter the pertinent account information. This preferred embodiment operation can facilitate a re-opening or renewal of the subscription account in one and the same interaction between the individual subscriber and the salesperson or check-out person at the retail facility.

If, at step 304, it is determined that the subscription account is still active, operation will proceed to step 307A and the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 will determine if any issues remain to be fulfilled on the subscription account. If, at step 307A, it is determined that no issues remain to be fulfilled, then operation will proceed to step 305 described above and notification of this fact will be provided to the individual subscriber and/or the salesperson and/or checkout person via the point-of-sale transaction device 40.

Thereafter, operation of the apparatus will proceed as described above with operation either ceasing and/or the individual subscriber renewing the subscription, extending the term of the subscription, and/or purchasing additional issues and/or arranging for same.

If, at step 307A, it is determined that issues remain to be fulfilled on the subscription account, then operation will proceed to step 307B and the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 will determine if the maximum time period or duration of the subscription has expired or lapsed. If, at step 307B, it

is determined that the time period or duration of the subscription has expired or lapsed, then operation will proceed to step 305 described above and notification of this fact will be provided to the individual subscriber and/or the salesperson and/or checkout person via the point-of-sale transaction device 40. Thereafter, operation of the apparatus will proceed as described above with operation either ceasing and/or the individual subscriber renewing the subscription, extending the term of the subscription, and/or purchasing additional issues and/or arranging for same.

If, at step 307B, it is determined that the time period or duration for the subscription has not expired, then operation will proceed to step 308 and the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 will transmit a signal to the point-of-sale transaction device 40 authorizing the pick-up of the issue by the individual subscriber. In the preferred embodiment, at step 308, the point-of-sale device 40, will generate and print a receipt of the transaction, via the printer or output device 40I, for the retail facility for the facility's records. In the preferred embodiment, at step 308, the point-of-sale device 40, will also generate and print a receipt of the

transaction, via the printer or output device 40I, for the individual subscriber for the individual subscriber's records.

At step 309, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 will record the fulfillment of the issue delivery and/or transaction, decrease by one the number of issues remaining to be fulfilled on the subscription account, and provide all record updating for the subscription account. The central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20, in the preferred embodiment, at step 309, will also update any and/or pertinent subscription account records and/or information, for the subscription account, in its database 20H as well as the corresponding records and/or information for the subscription account which are stored in the database 10H of the central subscription processing computer 10.

The above-described updates to the central subscription processing computer database 10H can be performed via transmitting an appropriate signal to the central subscription processing computer 10 and/or via dynamically linked database methods and/or techniques,

and/or via nay other device, method and/or techniques known by those skilled in the art.

Thereafter, operation of the apparatus will cease at step 310.

Alternatively, in any and/or all of the embodiments described herein, the subscription(s) may be initiated via a conventional mailing of subscription order form, and/or a "blow-in card" and/or a "bind-in card" typically found in periodicals.

In any and/or all of the embodiments described herein, the central subscription processing computer 10 and/or the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 can provide processing for any number and/or type of subscriptions. In this manner, the central subscription processing computer 10 and/or the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 can administer, manage, service, and/or provide processing, for any number and/or types of subscriptions.

In any and/or all of the embodiments described

herein, the apparatus and method of the present invention can provide for subscriptions which can be initiated and/or created via any communication device 30 and/or any point-of-sale transaction device 40. In any and/or all of the embodiments described herein, the subscriptions can be fulfilled and/or services by any retail and/or other facility. In this manner, for example, an individual subscriber may initiate a subscription for a periodical from any location and pick up the issues of the subscription from any retail facility, newsstand and/or store which is a participating facility and/or a facility which utilizes the present invention and/or which utilizes an appropriate point-of-sale transaction device 40, thereby providing flexibility in the issue pick-up location.

In any and/or all of the embodiments described herein, the individual subscriber or an agent and/or other third party intermediary, can access the central subscription processing computer 10 and/or the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20, via the communication device 30 and/or via the point-of-sale transaction device 40 so as to ascertain the status of a subscription such as, but not limited to, whether the subscription is active or inactive, and/or the fulfillment

status of the subscription, such as, but not limited to, the number of issues remaining, time for next renewal, etc.

In any and/or all of the embodiments described herein, the central subscription processing computer 10 and/or the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 can also notify individual subscribers, via any means, method and/or manner of communication, via the communication device 30 and/or the point-of-sale transaction device 40, of available subscriptions, of subscription sales and/or specials, of available new issues, renewal notices, extension notices, termination notices, subscription creation and/or initiation notices, shipment to and/or arrival of the subscription issue, goods and/or services at a respective retail facility and/or other facility, and/or of any other information which may be of interest to an individual subscriber.

In any and/or all of the embodiments described herein, the apparatus and method of the present invention can be utilized as a subscription clearinghouse, to match individual subscribers to subscriptions, wherein information regarding any number of, and types of, subscriptions can be stored in the database 10H of the

central subscription processing computer 10 and/or the database 20H of the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20. Any individual subscriber can access the respective central subscription processing computer 10 and/or central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 and search for a desired subscription or subscriptions. The individual subscriber may then apply for, and/or purchase a subscription.

In any and/or all of the embodiments described herein, an individual subscriber can list an order for a subscription and/or subscriptions, with information regarding the order being stored in the database 10 of the central subscription processing computer 10 and/or the database 20H of the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20. The central subscription processing computer 10 and/or the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 can thereafter process the order or order and notify the individual via the communication device 30 and/or the point-of-sale transaction device 40 if and when the ordered subscription is available. The individual subscriber may be notified via e-mail, electronic transmission, pager message, beeper message, telephone call, telephone message, letter, voice

message, physical mail delivery, and/or via any other appropriate means, method and/or technique.

In any and/or all of the embodiments described herein, any of the central subscription processing computer(s) 10, the central subscription fulfillment processing computer(s) 20, the communication device(s) 30, and/or the point-of-sale transaction device(s), can be programmed for automatic operation, self-activation, and/or programmed operation. The central subscription processing computer 10 and/or the central subscription fulfillment processing computer 20 can be programmed to automatically generate and/or to transmit messages and/or notices to any of the individual subscribers, retailers, goods and/or services providers, etc., regarding subscriptions, subscription fulfillment, the availability of subscriptions, availability of issues and/or goods and/or services which are the subject of a subscription.

In any and/or all of the embodiments described herein, intelligent agents, software agents, and/or mobile agents, can be utilized so as to act on behalf of any of the parties and/or any of the respective computers and/or devices described herein. Applicant hereby incorporates by

reference herein the subject matter of the Agent Sourcebook, A Complete Guide to Desktop, Internet and Intranet Agents, by Alper Caglayan and Colin Harrison, Wiley Computer Publishing, 1997. Applicant also incorporates by reference herein the subject matter of Cool Intelligent Agents For The Net, by Leslie L. Lesnick with Ralph E. Moore, IDG Books Worldwide, Inc. 1997.

The present invention provides an apparatus and method for providing subscription and/or subscription fulfillment services, and/or subscription related services. Individual subscribers can obtain subscriptions at discounts off the cover or list prices which being able to maintain control over their ability to receive the issues, goods and/or services, which are the subject of the subscription.

The present invention provides an apparatus and a method wherein all parties benefit. Individuals can obtain Subscriptions at cheaper subscription rates and obtain the issues, goods and/or services, which are the subject subscription, where and when desired. Retailers, subscription fulfillment entities, and/or entities can enjoy the benefits of increased business and/or repeated

business from individual subscribers. Subscription providers can enjoy the benefits of having increased subscriptions and/or subscription rates.

While the present invention has been described and illustrated in various preferred and alternate embodiments, such descriptions are merely illustrative of the present invention and are not to be construed to be limitations thereof. In this regard, the present invention encompasses all modifications, variations and/or alternate embodiments, with the scope of the present invention being limited only by the claims which follow.

CLAIMS

What Is Claimed Is:

1. An apparatus for providing subscription services, comprising:

a processor for processing a request to receive at least one of an issue, a good, and a service, pursuant to a subscription, wherein said request includes information concerning an existing subscription, wherein said processor processes said request and determines at least one of the status of the subscription, a number of at least one of issues, goods, and services, yet to be fulfilled pursuant to said subscription, and further wherein said processor generates a response which contains one of an authorization to provide said at least one of an issue, a good, and a service, and a denial to provide said at least one of an issue, a good, and a service; and

a transmitter for transmitting said response to a point-of-transaction device.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising:

a receiver for receiving said request for said at least one of an issue, a good, and a service, pursuant to a subscription from an individual subscriber.

3. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said request is received from at least one of a point-of-transaction device and a communication device.

4. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising:

an input device for inputting information regarding said request for said at least one of an issue, a good, and a service, pursuant to a subscription.

5. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein said receiver receives a second signal from a subscription processing device, wherein said second signal includes one of an authorization to provide said at least one of an issue, a good, and a service, pursuant to said subscription, and a denial to provide said at least one of an issue, a good, and a service, pursuant to said subscription.

6. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said processor determines at least one of whether a subscription is active and whether a subscription has expired.

7. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising:

at least one of an output device and a display device for at least one of outputting and displaying information regarding at least one of said subscription, said request, and said response.

8. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said processor updates subscription fulfillment information for said subscription in response to the issuance of the authorization to provide said at least one of an issue, a good, and a service.

9. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said apparatus is utilized at least one of on, over, and in conjunction with, a communication network, a wireless communication network, the Internet, and the World Wide Web.

10. An apparatus for providing subscription

information, comprising:

a memory device for storing subscription information;

a processor for processing a request for a subscription, wherein said processor processes said request for a subscription in conjunction with said subscription information, wherein said request contains a request to receive a pre-defined number of at least one of issues, goods, and services, over a pre-specified time period, wherein said pre-specified time period exceeds the normal time period for receiving all of said pre-defined number of said at least one of issues, goods, and services, and further wherein said processor generates a subscription record containing at least one of subscription information and a subscription price; and

at least one of an output device for outputting information contained in said subscription record, a display device for displaying information contained in said subscription record, and a transmitter for transmitting information contained in said subscription record to a communication device associated with an individual.

11. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein said request contains information regarding a request for at least one of a payment of a total subscription price and a payment per at least one of an issue, a good, and a service.

12. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein said subscription record contains at least one of a cost of a subscription, a term of a subscription, a number of said at least one of issues, goods, and services, included in a subscription, and a notification of at least one of an availability and an existence of a subscription.

13. The apparatus of claim 10, further comprising:

a receiver for receiving said request from a communication device associated with an individual.

14. A method for providing subscription services, comprising:

processing a request to receive at least one of an issue, a good, and a service, pursuant to a subscription, wherein said request includes information concerning an existing subscription;

determining at least one of the status of said subscription, and a number of at least one of issues, goods, and services, yet to be fulfilled pursuant to said subscription;

generating a response which contains at least one of an authorization to provide said at least one of an issue, a good, and a service, and a denial to provide said at least one of an issue, a good, and a service; and

transmitting said response to a point-of-transaction device.

15. The apparatus of claim 14, further comprising:

receiving said request from an individual subscriber for said at least one of an issue, a good, and a service, pursuant to said subscription.

16. The method of claim 14, further comprising:

inputting information regarding said request for said at least one of an issue, a good, and a service, pursuant to said subscription.

17. The method of claim 14, further comprising:

receiving a second signal from a subscription processing device, wherein said second signal includes one of an authorization to provide said at least one of an issue, a good, and a service, pursuant to said subscription, and a denial to provide said at least one of an issue, a good, and a service, pursuant to said subscription.

18. The method of claim 14, further comprising:

at least one of outputting and displaying information regarding at least one of said subscription, said request, and said response.

19. The method of claim 14, further comprising:

receiving a request for information regarding a subscription;

processing a request for a subscription in conjunction with subscription information, wherein said request contains a request to receive a pre-defined number of at least one of issues, goods, and services, over a pre-specified time period, wherein said pre-specified time period exceeds the normal time period for receiving all of said pre-defined number of said at least one of issues, goods, and services;

generating a subscription record containing at least one of subscription information and a subscription price; and

at least one of outputting information contained in said subscription record, displaying information contained in said subscription record, and transmitting information contained in said subscription record to a communication device associated with an individual.

20. The apparatus of claim 19, wherein said request contains information regarding a request for one of a payment of a total subscription price and a payment per at least one of an issue, a good, and a service, and further wherein said subscription record contains at least one of a cost of said subscription, a term of said subscription, a number of said at least one issues, goods, and services, included in said subscription, and a notification of at least one of an availability and an existence of said subscription.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

An apparatus and method for providing subscription services, including a processor, for processing a request to receive at least one of an issue, a good, and a service, pursuant to a subscription, wherein the request includes information concerning an existing subscription, wherein the processor processes the request and determines at least one of the status of the subscription, a number of the at least one of issues, goods, and services, yet to be fulfilled pursuant to the subscription, and further wherein the processor generates a response which contains one of an authorization to provide the at least one of an issue, a good, and a service, and a denial to provide the at least one of an issue, a good, and a service, and a transmitter for transmitting the response to a point-of-transaction device.

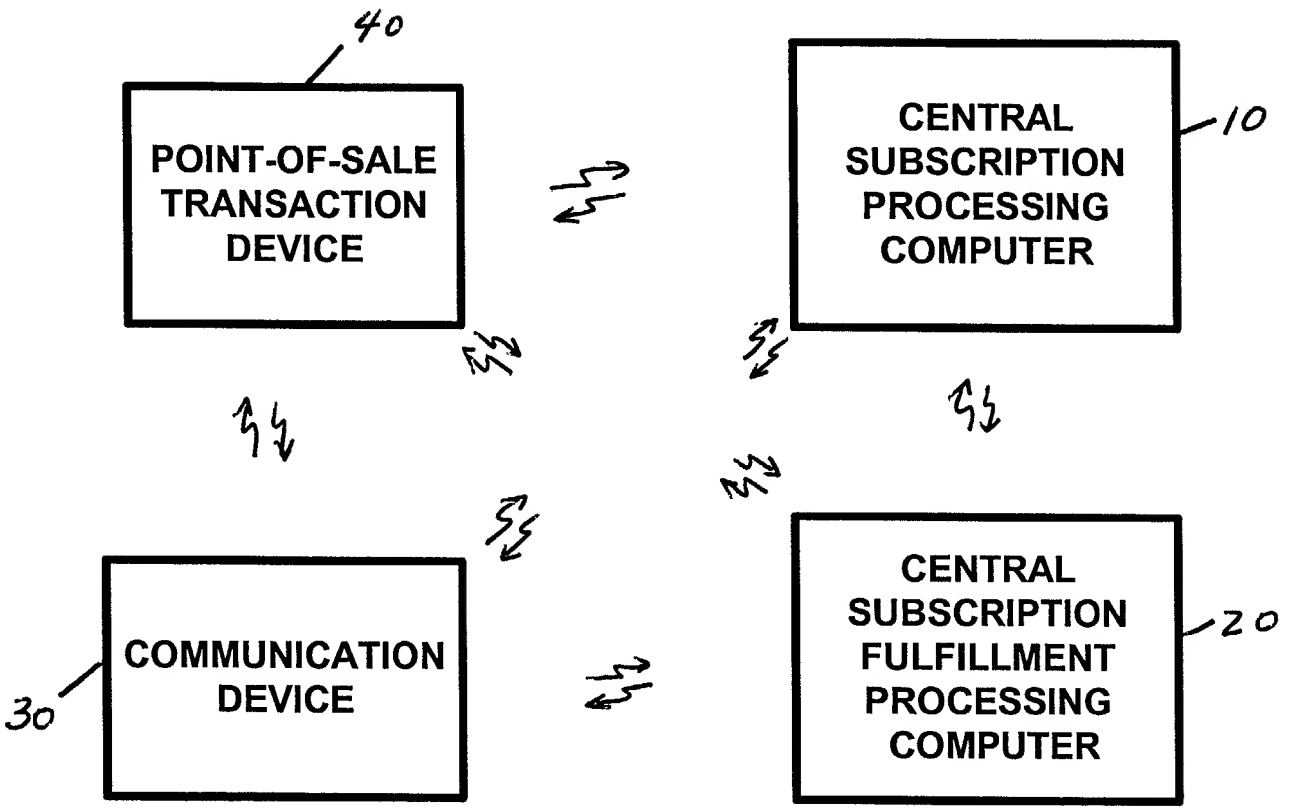

FIG. 1

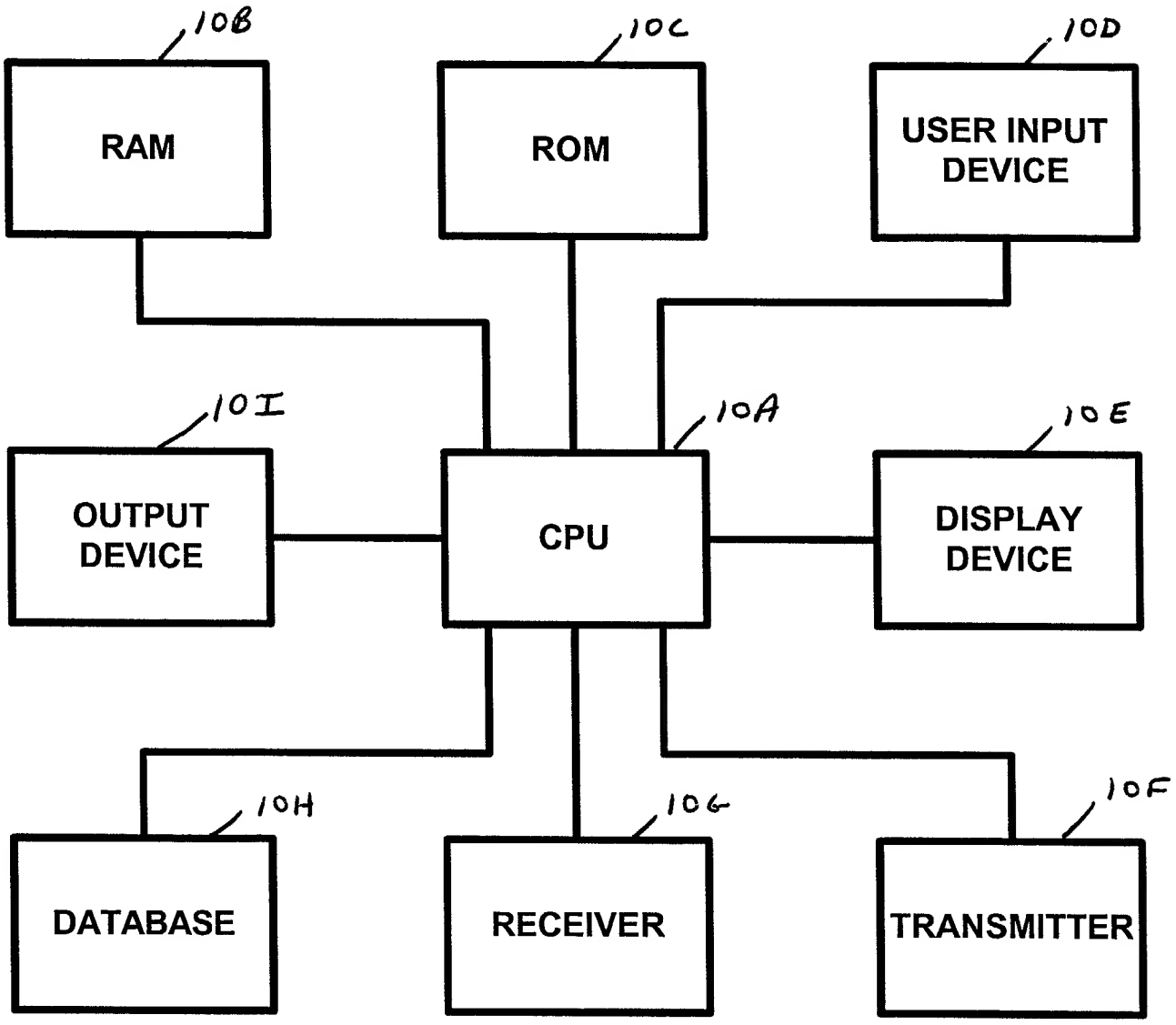

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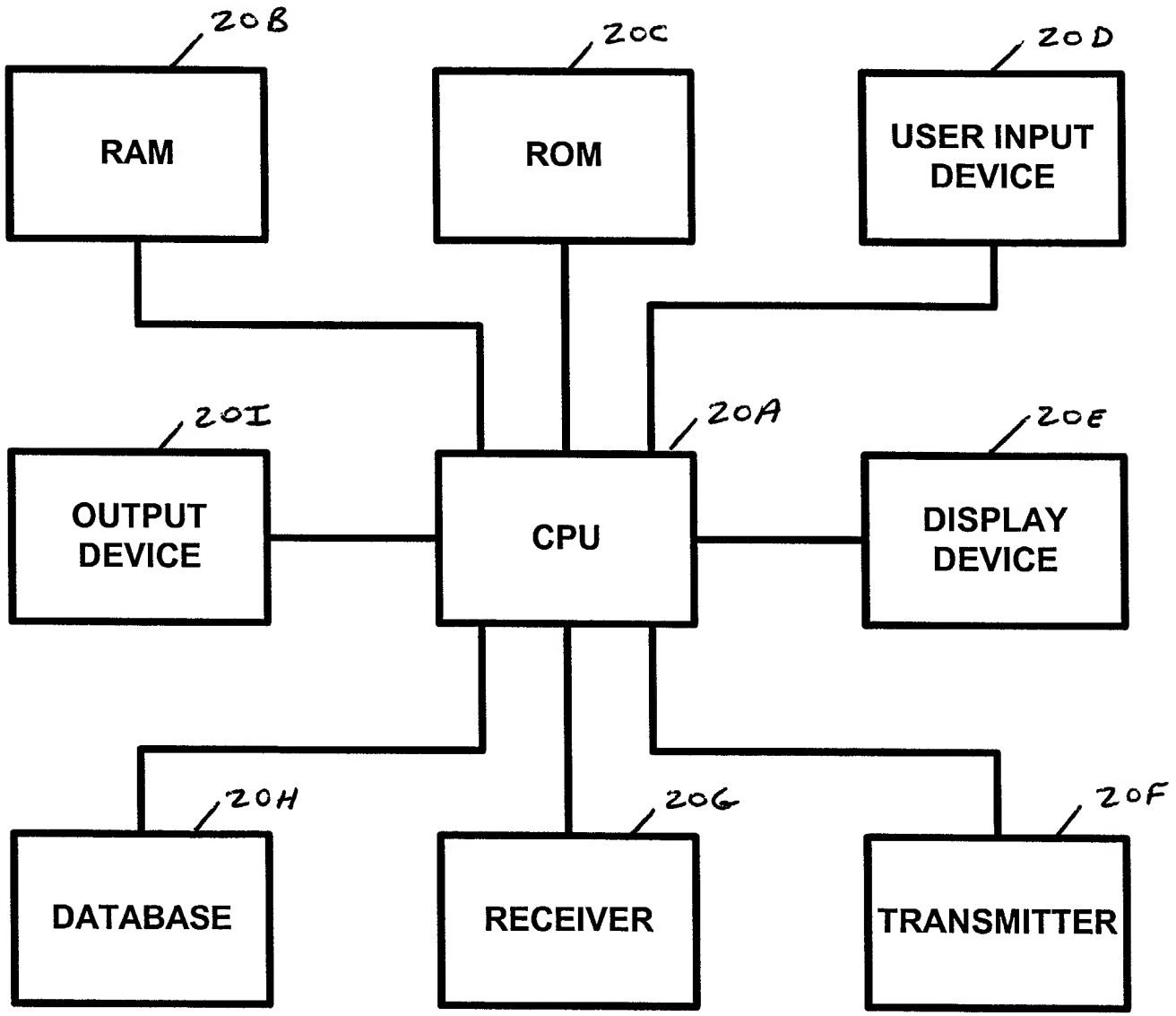
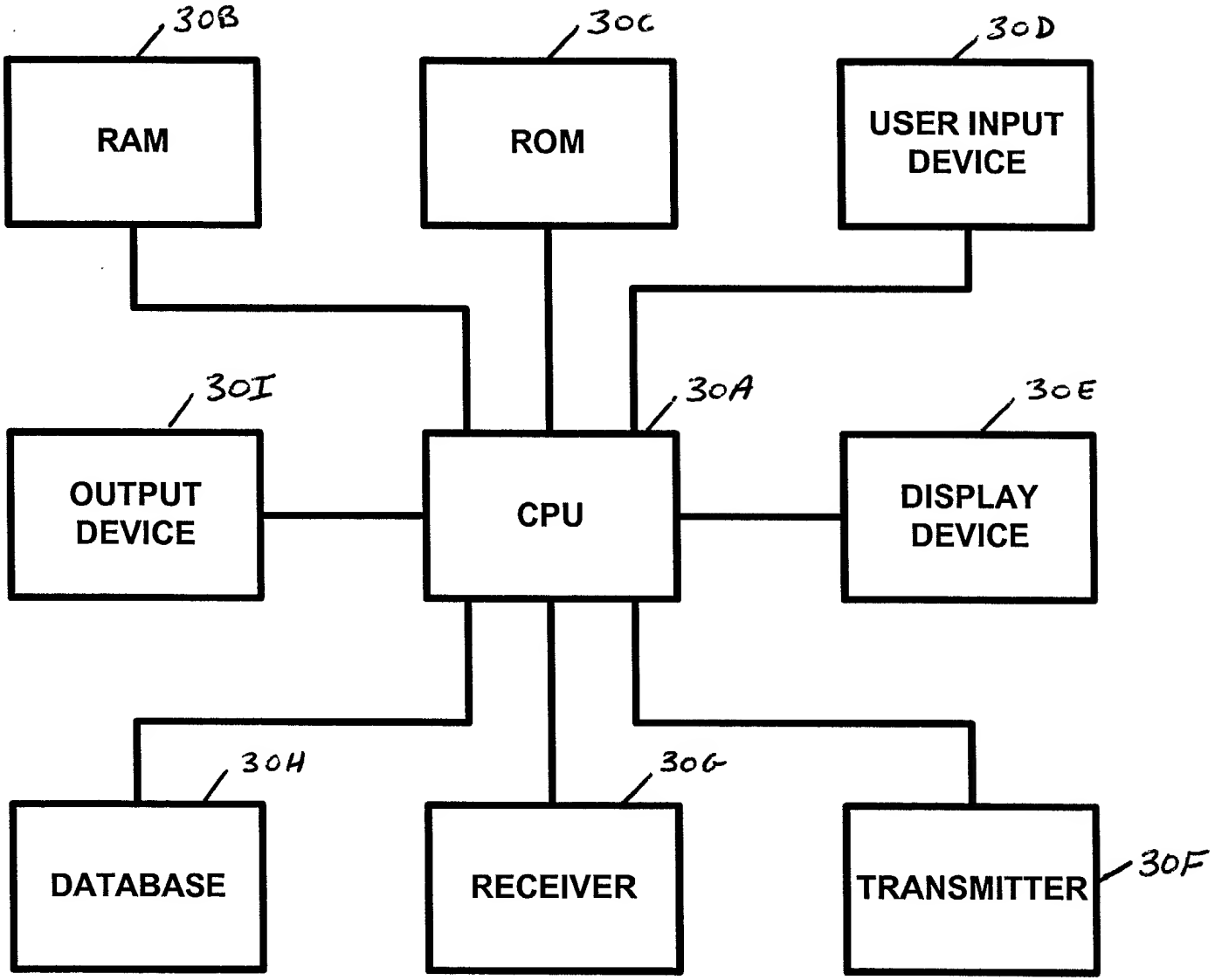
FIG. 2



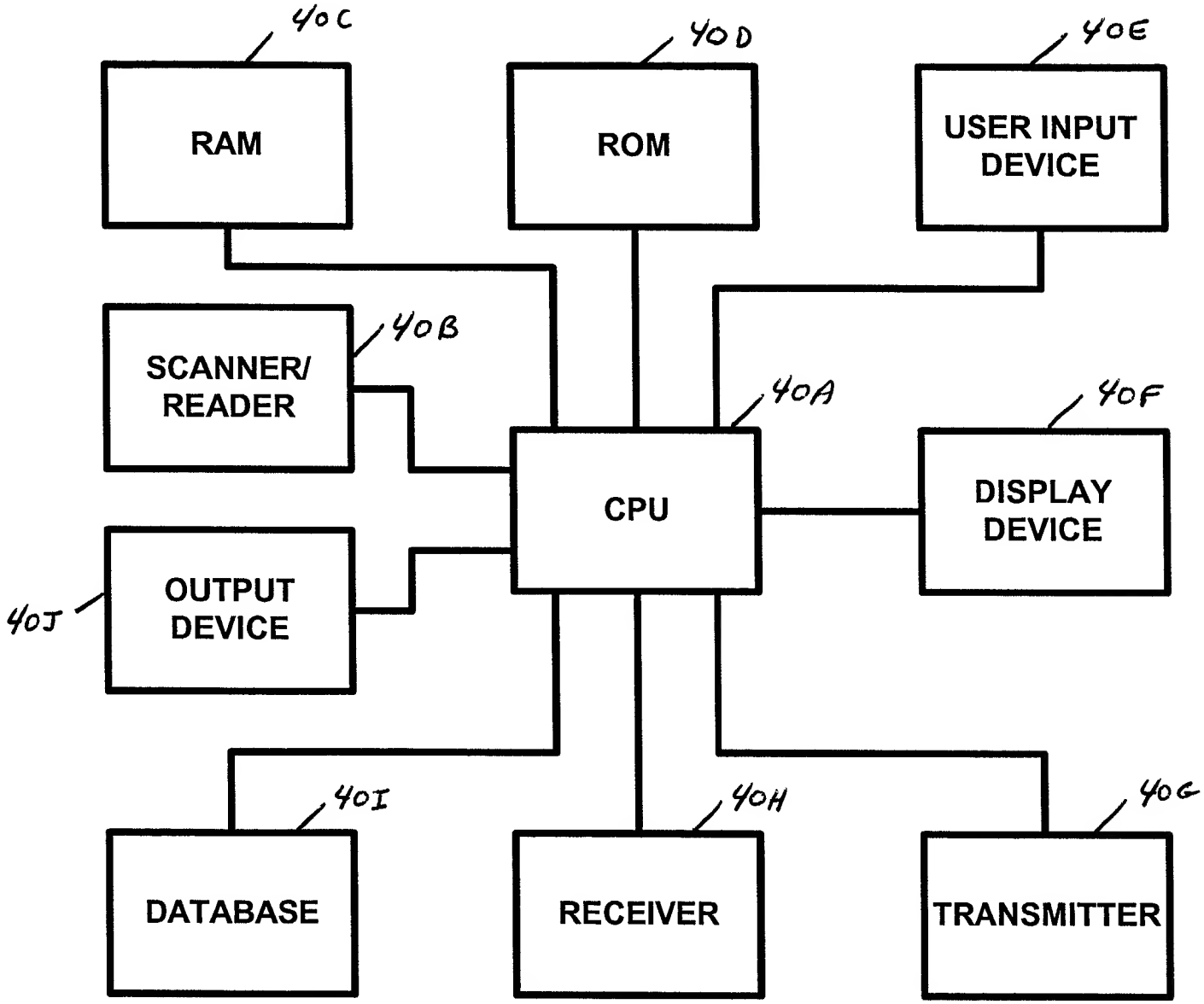
20

FIG. 3



30

FIG. 4



40

FIG. 5

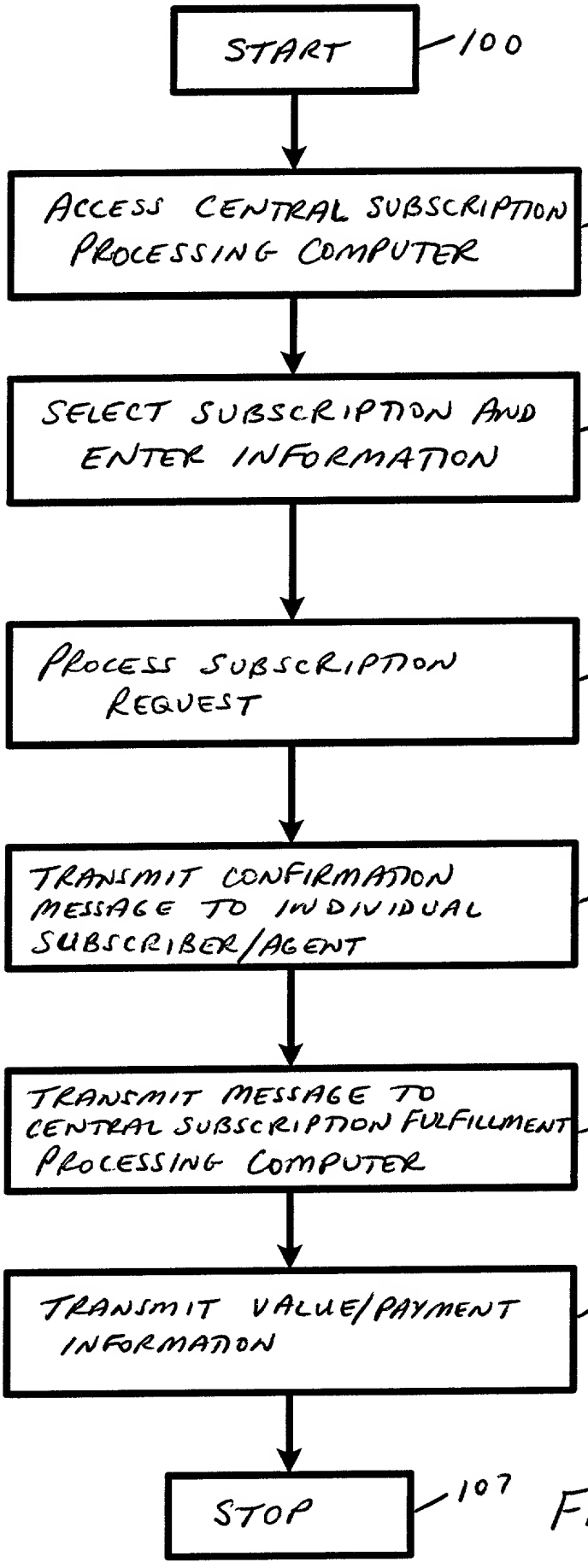

START
100
ACCESS CENTRAL SUBSCRIPTION PROCESSING COMPUTER
101
SELECT SUBSCRIPTION AND ENTER INFORMATION
102
PROCESS SUBSCRIPTION REQUEST
103
TRANSMIT CONFIRMATION MESSAGE TO INDIVIDUAL SUBSCRIBER/AGENT
104
TRANSMIT MESSAGE TO CENTRAL SUBSCRIPTION FULFILLMENT PROCESSING COMPUTER
105
TRANSMIT VALUE/PAYMENT INFORMATION
106
STOP
107

FIG. 6

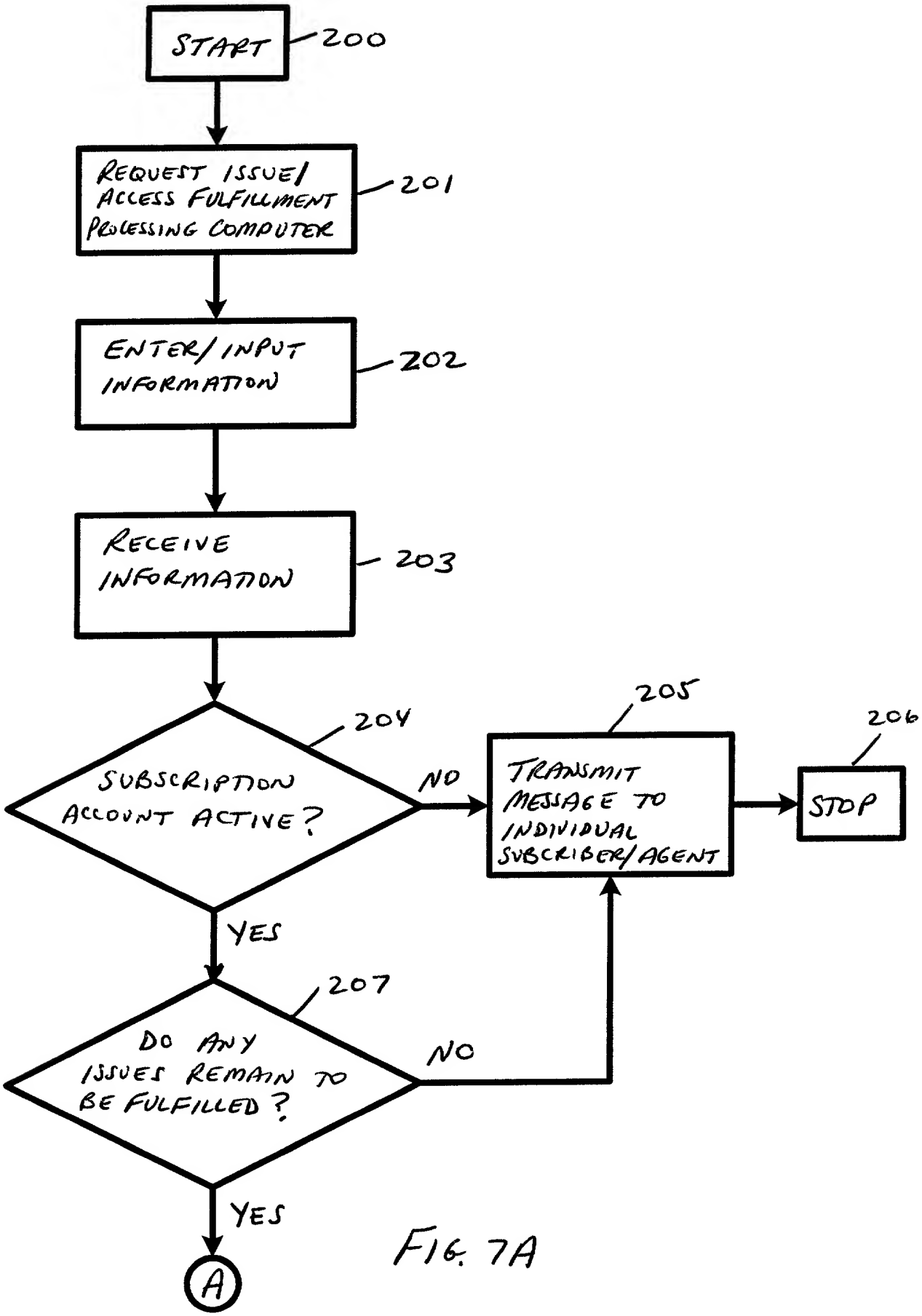

START
200
REQUEST ISSUE/ ACCESS FULFILLMENT PROCESSING COMPUTER
201
ENTER/INPUT INFORMATION
202
RECEIVE INFORMATION
203
SUBSCRIPTION ACCOUNT ACTIVE?
204
NO
205
TRANSMIT MESSAGE TO INDIVIDUAL SUBSCRIBER/AGENT
206
STOP
YES
DO ANY ISSUES REMAIN TO BE FULFILLED?
207
NO
YES
A

FIG. 7A

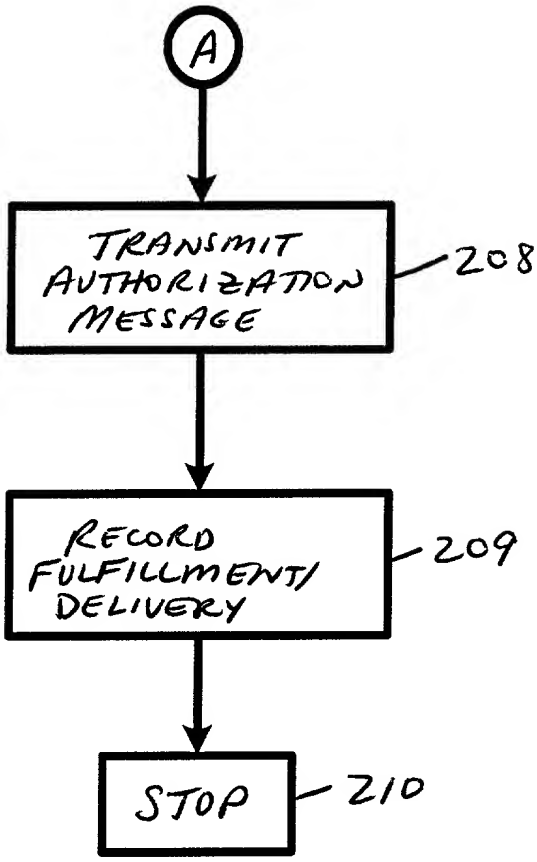

A
TRANSMIT AUTHORIZATION MESSAGE
208
RECORD FULFILLMENT/ DELIVERY
209
STOP
210

FIG. 7B

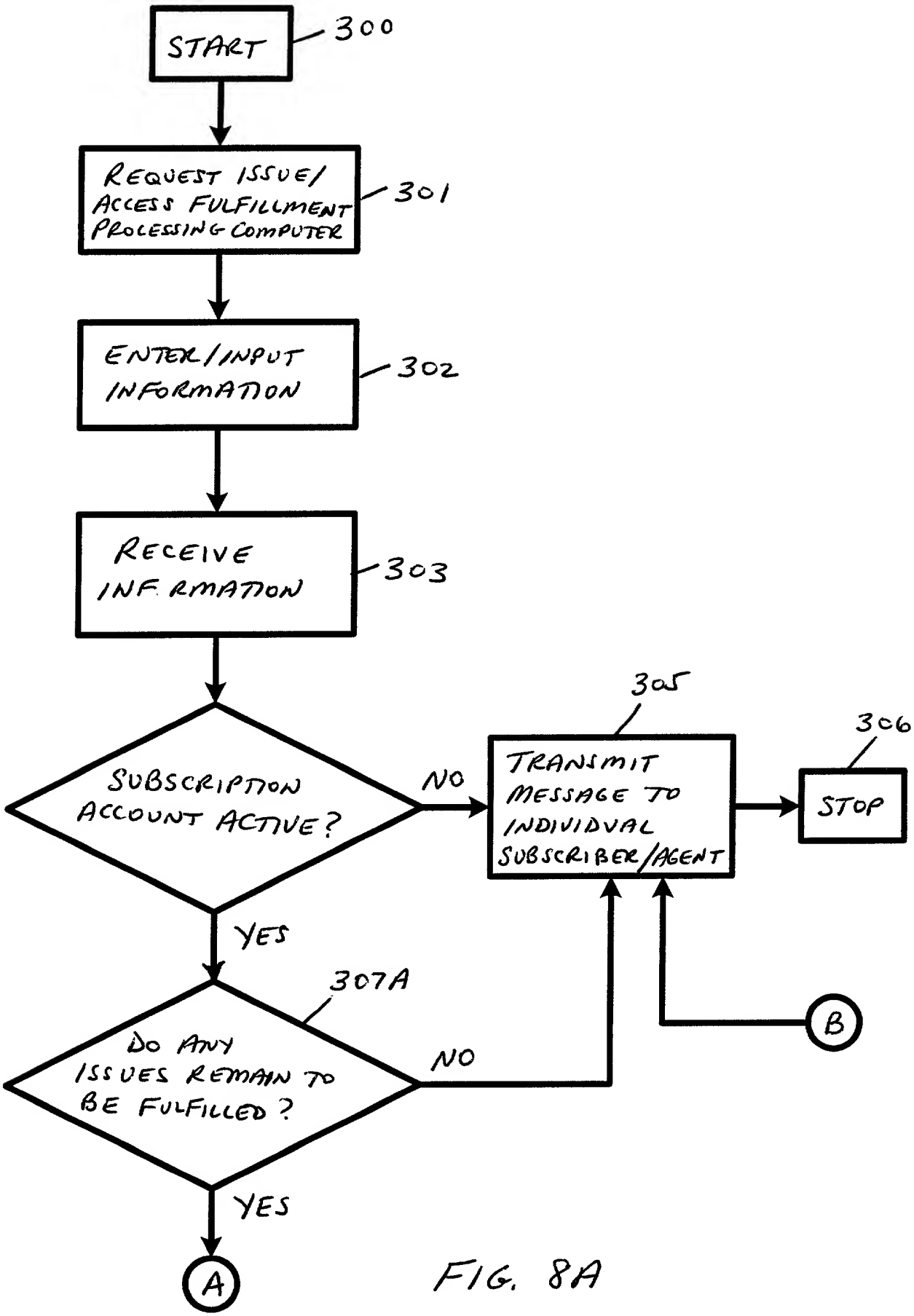

START
300
REQUEST ISSUE/ ACCESS FULFILLMENT PROCESSING COMPUTER
301
ENTER/INPUT INFORMATION
302
RECEIVE INFORMATION
303
SUBSCRIPTION ACCOUNT ACTIVE?
NO
305
TRANSMIT MESSAGE TO INDIVIDUAL SUBSCRIBER/AGENT
306
STOP
YES
307A
DO ANY ISSUES REMAIN TO BE FULFILLED?
NO
B
YES
A

FIG. 8A

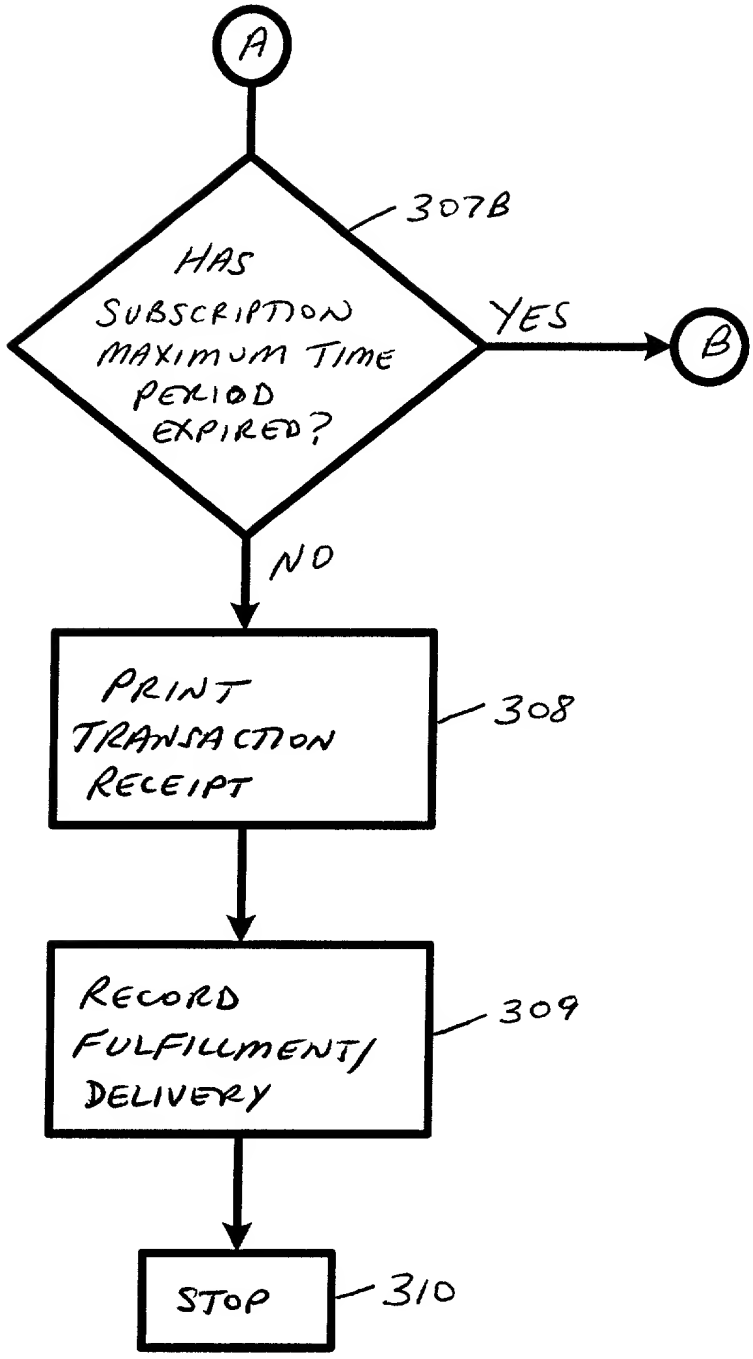

A
307B
HAS SUBSCRIPTION MAXIMUM TIME PERIOD EXPIRED?
YES
B
NO
PRINT TRANSACTION RECEIPT
308
RECORD FULFILLMENT/ DELIVERY
309
STOP
310

FIG. 8B

Please type a plus sign (+) inside this box → [+]

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DECLARATION — Utility or Design Patent Application

I hereby claim the benefit under 35 U.S.C. 120 of any United States application(s), or 365(c) of any PCT international application designating the United States of America, listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States or PCT International application in the manner provided by the first paragraph of 35 U.S.C. 112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in 37 CFR 1.56 which became available between the filing date of the prior application and the national or PCT international filing date of this application.

U.S. Parent Application or PCT Parent Number	Parent Filing Date (MM/DD/YYYY)	Parent Patent Number *(if applicable)*

☐ Additional U.S. or PCT international application numbers are listed on a supplemental priority data sheet PTO/SB/02B attached hereto.

As a named inventor, I hereby appoint the following registered practitioner(s) to prosecute this application and to transact all business in the Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith: ☐ Customer Number [ ] → *Place Customer Number Bar Code Label here*
OR
XX Registered practitioner(s) name/registration number listed below

Name	Registration Number	Name	Registration Number
RAYMOND A. JOAO	35,907		

☐ Additional registered practitioner(s) named on supplemental Registered Practitioner Information sheet PTO/SB/02C attached hereto.

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Address					
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Country	U.S.A.	**Telephone**	914-969-2992	**Fax**	914-969-2992

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under 18 U.S.C. 1001 and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

Name of Sole or First Inventor: ☐ A petition has been filed for this unsigned inventor

Given Name (first and middle [if any])	Family Name or Surname
RAYMOND ANTHONY	JOAO

Inventor's Signature	Raymond Anthony Joao					**Date**	9/11/00
Residence: City	YONKERS	**State**	N.Y.	**Country**	U.S.A.	**Citizenship**	USA
Post Office Address	122 BELLEVUE PLACE						
Post Office Address							
City	YONKERS	**State**	NEW YORK	**ZIP**	10703	**Country**	U.S.A.

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DECLARATION FOR UTILITY OR DESIGN PATENT APPLICATION (37 CFR 1.63)

[X] Declaration Submitted with Initial Filing OR [ ] Declaration Submitted after Initial Filing (surcharge (37 CFR 1.16 (e)) required)

Attorney Docket Number	RJ167
First Named Inventor	RAYMOND A. JOAO
COMPLETE IF KNOWN	
Application Number	/
Filing Date	SEPTEMBER 11, 2000
Group Art Unit	
Examiner Name	

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that:

My residence, post office address, and citizenship are as stated below next to my name

I believe I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or an original, first and joint inventor (if plural names are listed below) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled:

APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING AND/OR FOR FULFILLING SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

(Title of the Invention)

the specification of which
[X] is attached hereto
OR
[ ] was filed on (MM/DD/YYYY) [ ] as United States Application Number or PCT International Application Number [ ] and was amended on (MM/DD/YYYY) [ ] (if applicable).

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment specifically referred to above.

I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in 37 CFR 1.56.

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Prior Foreign Application Number(s)	Country	Foreign Filing Date (MM/DD/YYYY)	Priority Not Claimed	Certified Copy Attached? YES	NO
			[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
			[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
			[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
			[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

[ ] Additional foreign application numbers are listed on a supplemental priority data sheet PTO/SB/02B attached hereto.

I hereby claim the benefit under 35 U.S.C. 119(e) of any United States provisional application(s) listed below.

Application Number(s)	Filing Date (MM/DD/YYYY)	
60/154,740	09/17/1999	[ ] Additional provisional application numbers are listed on a supplemental priority data sheet PTO/SB/02B attached hereto.

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